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Ante Milicic Bags *ABSW*'s Player of the Year Award

Simply the best: Ante Milicic scooped out this year's ABSW Player of the Year.

By Peter Damalas

Parramatta Power striker Ante Milicic has been awarded *ABSW*'s Player of the Year for season 2003-04.

The award is given to the player judged the best performer in the National Soccer League throughout the course of the season by the publication's correspondents across Australia.

With 19 goals in the regular season, and with his club on course to challenge for the championship over the next four weeks, Milicic is a deserving winner for this year.

He has eclipsed all-time leading NSL goalscorer, Perth Glory's Damian Mori, and has held off the challenges of players in both the top six and in the lower half of the table.

Milicic was pleased to be voted the best player in the national league, but stated that his main goal is to play an important role for the winning team on April 4, grand final day.

He recognised the importance of his goals scored tally on this outcome and acknowledged the tremendous support of his teammates.

"In the end, strikers are judged by goals. I've scored nineteen so far and I've had a good run with injuries, only missing one game. Also taking into consideration we have not had a single penalty all year, I usually budget for about three, to be honest.

"I am lucky to have an attack minded coach. And I've missed Ahmad Elrich, he's the one that stands out for me. I'm sure that I would have scored a few more had he been in the team the whole time. I enjoy playing alongside [Sasho] Petrovski, who has been another main contributor, and [Fernando] Rech, when he is pushed up front," Milicic said.

The deadly combination between Milicic and Elrich came to the fore in last week's away victory over Adelaide United, a result which gives Parramatta a psychological advantage heading into the finals.

Certainly, Milicic's appetite for goals and glory remains as strong as ever.

"I hope to get a few more goals in the next month. As a striker, I want to score and I want to win. If this happens, then I'm happy, and that's the bottom line," he said.

It is this mantra that has carried Milicic forward in these past three seasons, his goals propelled former club Sydney Olympic to successive grand final appearances.

In a season which has been dominated by events off the field and international matches, Milicic has had a tremendous impact on the success of the expensively assembled Parramatta Power team and has been a bright spark in the final season of the National Soccer League.

His consistency up front has seen him rise to the top of the goalscorers charts for the second time in his career, and has inspired his teammates with his boundless energy and willingness to begin plays from deep.

"Some players that come back home from overseas may take the league a bit too easily. When I returned, I was at a stage where I wanted to win things. I can never forget the grand final loss with Sydney United. We keep harping on about memories, you can't put a price on them. That's why I'm always hungry for success," Milicic said.

This award will surely be a boost to the player and the club as they attempt to wrestle the title away from Perth's grasp. Parramatta will need to be at their best to defeat the Glory in the two-legged major semi final, which will grant them the right to host the Grand Final at Parramatta Stadium on April 4.

"Perth and Parramatta are the two strongest squads. Perth are slight favourites on us, but we are confident that we can upset them. The grand final is a one-off thing where anything can happen," Milicic said.

The 29 year old nominates the Marconi Stallions as the team from positions three to six, most likely to challenge the top two.

The uncertain future of the domestic game has cast a shadow over this season's conclusion. With rumours spreading about Parramatta's participation in a revamped national league, concentration is certainly difficult to maintain. But Milicic has his priorities in the right place.

"I just want to concentrate on April 4. It's in God's hands at the moment. There is no use worrying about things that are meant to happen," he said.

Other players who received recognition for their efforts this season include: Shaun Murphy (Perth Glory); Carl Veart (Adelaide United); Nick Carle (Marconi Stallions); Vaughan Coveny (South Melbourne); Brett Hughes (Sydney Olympic); Mark Rudan (Sydney United) and Chimaobi Nwaogazi (Wollongong Wolves).

This list of players reflects the widespread talent that is playing in Australia at the moment. The selection of the likes of Carle, Elrich and Simon Colosimo for the Socceroos, and the performance of Milicic indicates that there is life still in Australian soccer.

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Plus a full report on the Italian - English - Greek - Spanish and various other European domestic leagues.

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BY DANIEL KUZIOW

SOCCEROO striker David Zdrilic has denied reports he is unhappy with Scottish Premier League club Aberdeen and that he will be returning to Australia for next season's revamped National Soccer League.

Zdrilic insists the only time he has been unhappy at Pittodrie was when an injury had sidelined him.

The Australian's contract expires at the end of the season and he has yet to hold talks regarding an extension.

He said: "I'm the first to admit it is different here to what I am used to, but I came here for football to try and revitalise my career.

"The only time I can say I was unhappy was when I was out injured and I know there are few footballers who would not feel the same.

David Zdrilic: A return to Australia has been put on hold stating that he is quite happy in Scotland.

"I am enjoying my football here, the fans are second to none."

★ ★ ★ ★

Brondby have been linked with Ajax midfielder Jason Culina.

Culina has been a regular on the bench for Ajax this year, but has played only once under coach Ronald Koeman.

The Australia U23 international has had loan spells at GBA and De Graafschap since arriving in Amsterdam in 1999 and Brondby are said to be keen to take him to Denmark at the end of the season.

★ ★ ★ ★

Former Charlton and Blackburn midfielder Matthew Holmes has been awarded agreed damages of £250,000 at the High Court for a tackle by Australian defender Kevin Muscat.

Holmes suffered a broken tibia in the tackle by then Wolves defender Muscat in an FA Cup game in February 1998.

Holmes launched a £2m lawsuit against the club and Muscat, who now plays for Millwall, though neither party has admitted any liability.

"I am delighted by the outcome," said Holmes, who now plays for Dorchester Town. The total cost to the defendants, including legal fees, is expected to top £750,000.

Richard Davies QC, representing Muscat and Wolves, said they did not believe the tackle led to the end of Holmes' career while John McParland, Holmes' barrister, called it "the second most expensive tackle in British football and legal history".

Holmes added: "My goal throughout was to prove that Mr Muscat's challenge was a very bad one and it ruined my career.

"I can't say enough to thank all those players, managers and commentators who have come forward to help me and given of themselves to assist in the preparation of the case. I am eternally grateful to them all.

"I pay special thanks to all the players and staff at Charlton. Charlton are a great club and look after their players on and off the field."

Source - Tribalfootball

Liverpool ace Harry Kewell is furious with former Australia captain John Warren over criticisms of the way he pulled out of last week's international friendly in Venezuela.

"I really thought that John had a bit more class than to take cheap shots at me," Kewell told the Sunday Age.

"As I've said in the past, I don't mind what people say as long as they tell the truth.

"I can even understand if he made a mistake, but to get four things wrong in three sentences is just a deliberate attempt to throw mud at me. In football that is a red-card offence and it should be in journalism as well.

"John likes to put himself across as Mr Soccer and a person who knows what he is talking about. If he can't be bothered giving Liverpool, my manager or me a call to find out the truth on something this simple how can he be trusted on anything he pretends to be an expert on."

Kewell's agent, Bernie Mandic, revealed the Aussie had helped raise money for him in a charity auction by donating a jersey.

"This is pretty funny coming from a bloke who has continually had problems with Harry's supposed lack of patriotism because he easily accepted the money raised from the England v Australia shirt at his auction," said Mandic. "There was not even a thank-you to Harry for his efforts there.

"I've always been told that Johnny is a thoroughly decent and fair man. As such he should live by the same rules he expects others to live by."

★ ★ ★ ★

New boy Dylan Macallister has been an instant success for his new club, Brann Bergen, and seems to have settled into his new red jersey nicely.

With two goals in two training-matches leading up to the kickoff of the Norwegian Premiership season, he has already become a firm fans favorite with the Bergen outfit.

After Saturday's 2-2 draw against fellow Premiership team Sogndal, coach Mons Ivar Mjelde described MacAllister as "unafraid, tenacious and tough, a constant threat from set-pieces, skillful and an excellent distributor of the ball."

"It looks very promising for the upcoming season," Mjelde told local newspaper Bergens Tidende.

Speaking to the same newspaper, MacAllister spoke of his joy of playing alongside his new teammates.

"In my second outing with the team I was able to leave all the pressure behind in the locker room, and focus on my football," he said. "The centre-backs in Norway are very big, strong and tough. But I'm used to that from Australia where they always play the biggest guys at the back."

He continued: "I am looking forward to starting the new season, but I'm probably going to be pretty nervous on my Premiership debut."

Brann Bergen's new number 9 – Former Northern Spirit striker Dylan Macallister has grabbed rave reviews in Norway with his new club.

On April 12, Brann Bergen kicks off their season hosting reigning champions Rosenborg.

★ ★ ★ ★

Aussie striker Scott McDonald was "over the moon" after making his full SPL debut for Motherwell in Saturday's 1-0 win over Kilmarnock.

While delighted to get a first SPL start under his belt, McDonald was quick to reflect on the result.

"It was a tough, gritty sort of match. But the three points are very welcome, we're now closing in on fourth spot and chasing that European place," McDonald told tribalfootball.com last night.

"I'm 20, y'know, but I feel like a veteran in this team!

I played up front alongside Davie Clarkson and he's just 18. There's a few other lads my age or younger, it's very exciting being part of this setup."

McDonald was handed a start after scoring for the U21s last week and added, "It's come quicker than I initially expected. Don't get me wrong, I want to play all the time! But the coaching staff were saying that I probably wouldn't be fully match-fit until the tail end of the season.

"But I'm coping well and feel in great shape. I had a header just kiss the cross-bar and a few bits-and-pieces in the second-half, so I'm well confident that I'll get chances to convert."

And playing for a manager like Terry Butcher?

"It's pretty amazing. I had Glenn Hoddle and Gordon Strachan at Southampton, but was out of the first team picture there, whereas here at Motherwell, I'm working closely with Terry.

"He's obviously a massive name and it's brilliant working for a gaffer like him, particularly with the way he shows so much faith and support in his young players.

It's a cracking club to be part of.

★ ★ ★ ★

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger has blasted the Australian SA over their ban for Leeds striker Mark Viduka.

Wenger believes that the ASA should have shown more understanding of Leeds' position and declared the "problem of Viduka is ridiculous".

He added: "You don't expect a federation to suspend him, considering the situation of Leeds and the fact that it was a friendly, I think it's dreadful for Leeds.

"It affects us indirectly - but I don't consider that when I say what I think.

"Of course, it could be an advantage for us with Viduka playing, but I consider the direct effect on Leeds. They are in a special situation with their finances.

"Leeds can still win without

Viduka, but, without speculating on the result, the Australian football federation could have said before a friendly 'we know you're in a difficult position, so we'll leave Viduka where he is'."

Wenger believes that such cases make it less likely that leading clubs will buy Australian players in the future.

"You wouldn't be encouraged to do that. Not only do you lose your players for the games, but for the travelling as well," he reflected.

"What happens to Viduka makes you think twice about it."

★ ★ ★ ★

Empoli's Primavera squad led by young Australian rising stars Nicholas Stavroulakis and Frank Lagana were two lucky lads last week after their squad took part in the prestigious Viareggio World Youth tournament final against Juventus.

The 56th Viareggio tournament final had Juve take out the final against Empoli three-nil with a number of Italian stars watching from the onset of the field.

Giovanni Trappatoni, Paolo Maldini, Franco Baresi, Vincenzo Montella, Paolo Rossi and Alessandro Costacurta were among the famous faces at the youth final.

It was a monumental day for the young Aussies who are among the few 'down-under' stars to play in such a match.

Next year, A.P.I.A. Leichhardt will represent Oceania in the Viareggio tournament under head-coach John Romeo.

Motherwell have been impressed with former Young Socceroo skipper Scotty McDonald's performances since his move from the U.K.

BILL TURNER CALLS IT A DAY

By John Economos

At the 2003 Annual General meeting of the Northern NSW Schools Soccer Association Inc. Lindsay Hewison was unanimously elected president.

Lindsay replaces Bill Turner who has been involved in many forms of school Soccer since the late 1950s.

Lindsay Hewison told *ABSW* that despite the fact that Bill had stepped aside as president they were able to retain his services as Patron. His knowledge and advice will be invaluable.

In 1973 Lindsay began his schools Soccer career. He is presently a highly-regarded language teacher at the Hills Sports High School. He has coached school teams at Kingsgrove, Endeavour, Muirfield and Grantham.

He started his administrative career assisting John Moscovis in Sydney in 1986. Since that time he has proved to be one of the best in administering school football and joined Bill Turner in being awarded Life Membership.

Bill Turner: Retiring old guard

As well as now being president of the Northern NSW Schools Soccer Association, Lindsay has four other positions to manage.

Assisting him are two other outstanding teachers plus a number of others on the executive.

One of the two executives working with Lindsay is Warren Sheehah who played in the Churches competition in the 1980s and made a comeback in 2002-2003 in the over 35s. He is a qualified referee and a more than competent coach. He is the secretary of the executive.

Peter Kneale is the other teacher closely assisting Lindsay Hewison. As well as being an excellent player he has proved himself as a top schools coach. His boys teams at Pennant Hills are never taken lightly.

In recent times, the above-mentioned people have also been in charge of developing the Bill Turner Trophy.

The Trophy is a competition for girls fifteen years and under - the same age group as the boys Cup competition.

Formally run by Soccer NSW the then president Mr Peter Gray requested it be controlled by the Northern NSW Schools Soccer Association. This request went straight into operation and 2004 will be the fifth year as such.

It was actually started in 1990 by teachers Ron Pratt and Sue Andrews and suffered a number of adversities before Mr Gray made his decision and Lindsay Hewison put in charge.

Lindsay Hewison: New guard

And the growth has been phenomenal. By 2005 the entries could closely match the boys Cup competition particularly when the ever-enthusiastic North Queensland schools are included.

Already some Northern Victorian schools have entered similar to the Cup entries. Quite a number of parents, students and some teachers in Victoria have asked if they could enter one or both competitions.

At present Lindsay is aware of the extended Bill Turner Cup competition in Western Australia which is catching the imagination in that state. A teacher from a Tasmanian school sought information about starting up a competition similar to Western Australia.

No enquires from Northern Australia and South Australia have been received.

Lindsay Hewison is walking into a scene with his eyes wide open. He has shared quite a number of Bill Turner's heartbreaks in more recent years.

A few years ago the competition almost folded but the schools protested and agreed to pay a small entry fee. That along with the ever present support from the great Northern NSW Soccer Federation should see about a thousand entries this year.

Following more than 50 years of dilligent duty to Soccer, Bill Turner in recent times is suffering much ill health. We at *ABSW* wish Mr Turner a very speedy recovery.

NEW LEAGUE INTERESTS COMMENCE

The ASA last week announced that the opening date for lodgment of Expressions of Interest by prospective members of the new national soccer league would be extended.

The date foreshadowed in the NSL Task Force report released in December 2003 was February 28, 2004, but the ASA has decided to extend this to take account of the imminent arrival of Mr John O'Neill as Managing Director of the new league.

The revised date for the opening date for lodgment of Expressions of Interest will be determined following Mr O'Neill's start date of March 8.

The Acting Chief Executive of the ASA, Mr Richard Johnson, said it was important for Mr O'Neill as the new Managing Director to have input into the league's business plan and the details of the Expression of Interest document.

"It is essential that Mr O'Neill has the opportunity to be briefed by the Implementation Team on the work undertaken to date and that he contribute fully to the discussion on the structure of the new league with ASA staff and others in the soccer community," Mr Johnson said.

"These arrangements are not expected to delay the introduction of the new national soccer league competition."

Its been noted that a number of clubs have written to ASA about their concerns on the delay of the new APL league next season.

South Melbourne and the Perth Glory have stressed their opinions on this issue and have asked for answers about the new criteria be handed down as quick as possible.

Look to see a few surprise sides pop up in the interest factor – one notable one could be the Canberra venture along with Tasmania as well.

QLD Lions have also stressed their fight to take part in next year's APL by signing a few major sponsors on the eve of their QLD Premier League season.

Strong rumours in Sydney have it that a new club by the name of the Sydney Blues could still be in the hunt for one of the two Sydney spots given.

Parramatta Power, at one stage looked down and out, could well take out a position in next year's competition thanks to some last minute lobbying with 'major sporting clubs' in Sydney West.

CARDOZO TO GO MEXICAN?

Strong sources around Sydney's soccer circles have it that Sydney Olympic's gun striker Pablo Cardozo could well ditch the new Australian league next season and play in the Mexican First Division.

The powerful striker had a sound season with the Blues this year but did state at the start of his contract with the club that it was not to be a permanent stay in Australia.

Could it be a Mexican fiesta for Pablo Cardozo next season?

Mexico has been somewhat of a mystery country for Australian players taking part in that league but this year has seen Northern Spirit keeper Paul Henderson venture off for trials too.

'Hendo' could be joining close friend Pablo in the land of the sombreros if all goes well.

Cardozo has already expressed interests from various Australian clubs but due to the undecided vision, that is on who will be in next years competition, a move overseas could be imminent.

The "Zorbaroos"

The Australian Soccer Association (ASA) last week announced that it has confirmed an international match for the Australia Under-23s (Olympic team) against Greece to be played at the Panthessaliko Stadium, Volos (Magnisia) on Tuesday 30 March 2004.

The match was confirmed following an invitation extended to ASA from the Greek Football Federation for the Australia Under-23 team to play Greece at the stadium inauguration in Volos following its redevelopment for the 2004 Athens Olympic Games.

The game kicks-off the national Under-23 team's build-up towards this year's tournament for the 2004 Athens Olympic Games following the team's qualification in January.

The men's football tournament at the 2004 Athens Olympic Games will be held between 11 August and 28 August 2004, with the group draw for the tournament due to be staged on 9 June 2004.

It will be the first match for an Australia Under-23 side against Greek Under-23 opposition, however the two countries have played 7 times at international level, with six matches for 2 wins, 2 draws and 2 losses at senior level and one match at Under-20 level.

Coach Frank Farina will name an 18-man squad for the match and will then hand over the reins to this match to assistant national team coach Graham Arnold, as Frank Farina will be in London for the Socceroos highly anticipated match against South Africa on 30 March.

The Panthessaliko Stadium in Volos, one of the most beautiful cities at the middle eastern part of Greece and one of six football venues, will host the preliminary phase of the Olympic Football Tournament games.

The Panthessaliko Sports Complex has undergone the reformation of the existing stands and buildings into a new structure of 21,000 seats.

Greece has been a sleeping giant of late in world football.

The senior team recently qualified for the Euro 2004 championships in Portugal while their U23 squad have grabbed rave reviews from the European press.

Led by former Panathinaikos and Greek international defender Stratos Apostolakis the Greeks will be no pushover side for Farina's boys.

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NSL Finals Preview

(6) Brisbane Strikers vs (3) Adelaide United

DEFENCE AND SOLIDARITY THE KEY

Who will be smiling at the end of this dogged two-legged finals series between the Strikers (left) & Adelaide United?

By Peter Damalas

An interesting clash between two clubs that have surprised many with their form in qualifying for the top six.

Sixth placed Brisbane Strikers have dealt admirably with the loss of star playmaker, Brazilian Fernando Rech, who joined Parramatta Power on the eve of this season, while John Kosmina was replaced at the helm by player-coach Stuart McLaren and assistant, Luciano Trani, after a period of five years at the club.

McLaren has been able to bring the best out of a group of honest, hard working players, and has achieved the club's goal of top six qualification with a compact squad in his first season as coach.

While Brisbane lack real star quality, they have a good blend of experience and young talent.

Adelaide United were born out of the ashes of Adelaide City Force, who withdrew from the National Soccer League only weeks before season 2003-04 began. The new club was given a short amount of time to prepare for competition, and to their credit, have established a professionally run and well supported club.

Two factors have combined to push South Australian soccer back into the limelight. Kosmina was handed the coaching job, and has created a competitive and fired up squad, reviving the careers of many players facing uncertain futures after the disbanding of the Force.

And there is a tremendous buzz at Hindmarsh Stadium, the community have immediately taken the team to their hearts, hoping and expecting a fresh, "united" approach. With crowds of 10,000 plus, the team has a significant advantage at home.

In United's very first match, against the Strikers, City old-boy Carl Veart scored the winning goal, the first of ten for the former Socceroo.

Like the Zoran Matic coached predecessor, United have their consistency and tenacity to thank for the finish in third position.

Goals have been hard to come by for both Adelaide and Brisbane, and defence is set to dominate the first leg of this elimination final.

Solidarity is a key value in these two squads- both will rely on teamwork rather than individual brilliance to progress further in this competition.

The two regular season fixtures between the clubs ended 1-0 apiece, this indicating the closeness between them and the importance of discipline and determination over attacking flair.

The Strikers will be relying on McLaren to lead from the back, alongside Young Socceroo and Olyroo centre back Matthew McKay and Wayne Heath.

Veart and attacking midfielders Aurelio Vidmar and Ross Aloisi will pose the main threat to the home side, but the outcome of this fixture may well rest on how the Strikers respond to the pressure of finals football.

Brisbane have faltered in recent weeks when a certain spot in the top six was staring them in the face. After defeating closest contenders Sydney

United, they lost to Parramatta (when they might have achieved a result), and most disappointingly, to Melbourne Knights and Wollongong, both out of the reckoning.

This inexperience in closing out results may prove costly. And the loss of mainstay defenders Karl Dodd (Out for the year with a knee injury) and Josh McCloughan to injury have also hurt the team's prospects, considering they lack the depth of the top two finalists.

Adelaide have been past masters of scoring crucial away goals and preserving leads in pressure situations, and look like they are on the right track to do the same in Brisbane.

With home ground advantage worth at least one goal in the second leg, Brisbane may be forced to come out of their shell and achieve a positive result to take to Adelaide next week.

This match will be another learning curve for young strikers Joshua Rose and Luke Morley, who will be under pressure to find the back of the net.

Creative midfielder David Pilic will also be called upon to make an impression on the finals.

While United make their finals debut in their first season, their squad comprises the bulk of Adelaide City, a club renowned for their reputation at the business end of the season.

Should Kosmina's men hold out the Strikers away from home (this is certainly not beyond them), they will enter the second leg as favourites.

(5) South Melbourne vs (4) Marconi Stallions

Traditional Powerhouse fight to say alive

Attack will be the key for both South Melbourne (Left) and the Stallions (Right) when the pair meet this weekend.

By Peter Damalas

Like the first elimination final, this contest involves two teams whose results have varied of late.

While Marconi Stallions enter the finals with a number of consecutive wins under their belt, South Melbourne went into their final round fixture with four losses on the trot.

As previous top six series have shown, however, regular season form can be misleading and it is largely what occurs on the day, that determines who progresses and who is eliminated.

For this reason, Souths fans may feel cautiously optimistic about their team's chances. The mood within the camp has been upbeat, despite the battering their confidence has taken throughout February. The loss of form coincided with the absence of key defenders Mehmet Durakovic, Levent Osman, Simon Storey and Steve Laurie through injury.

Their return in time for the crunch match at Marconi Stadium will surely lift the away side.

Marconi have major injury concerns of their own. Captain Brad Maloney is out for the two legs, after picking up a hamstring injury in the 1-0 loss to Adelaide United last week.

His leadership and penchant for scoring match winning goals is critical in tight finals situations, and he will be sorely missed (his suspension coincided with the team's mid-season slump).

Up front also, coach Jean Paul de Marigny will have to make do without Jeromy Harris, out for the season after he sustained an ankle injury. Former championship winner Joe Spiteri will lead the line up front.

The performance of both teams in qualifying for the top six, after missing out last season, has restored pride to these traditional powerhouses of the domestic game.

To their credit, both clubs have overcome losing players to the various national teams throughout this campaign (Marconi 4 players, South Melbourne 2), and have dealt extremely well with fixture changes.

Marconi, in particular, have profited from the time off in January, (they had four players involved in the Olympic Games qualifiers and opted to defer matches) as the players were able to regroup and begin their charge towards the finals.

What impact eight matches in four weeks will have on their finals chances remains to be seen.

On the one hand, Marconi have been hardened by this experience and may be able to make a smooth transition from regular season to post-season football. Considering their aspirations have been on the line in each of their past eight matches, the Stallions have grown accustomed to playing under pressure.

However, the sheer amount of games played recently may stretch the squad's depth to the maximum, and it will be increasingly difficult for the tightly knit squad to maintain peak form for another four weeks.

If this is the case, the fresher South Melbourne outfit will be prime to pounce.

Coach Stuart Munro will be keen to revive South's fortunes, as they had challenged for a top two finish, and the double chance in the finals, for three quarters of the season.

Key players in their campaign include Olyroo goalkeeper Eugene Galegovic, defensive midfielder Ante Kovacevic and goalscoring midfielder Vaughan Coveny. With a capable supporting cast of young players, South Melbourne have the quality to overcome any one of the five finalists, on their day.

The first leg is likely to be a closely fought match, with the home side playing strong and steady at the back and relying on the pace, creativity and flair of representative players Nick Carle and Alex Brosque, the former looming as the player most likely to keep the Stallions in the hunt for the championship.

Brosque has had a slow end towards the season but has stated that he will bounce back just in time for the finals.

These two players have the ability to unlock their opponents defence, and goals will be at a premium in this first leg.

South Melbourne simply must defend better away from home- should they address this issue in time for their visit to Marconi Stadium, they may have the upper hand in the return leg, as they are able to turn it on in front of their supporters.

Marconi, on the other hand, are more adept to grounding out results as opposed to blowing the opposition away.

"Viduka Has Been Made Unfairly a Black Sheep" — Rasic

Australian 1974' coach Rale Rasic has leapt to the defence of Mark Viduka about his absence in Venezuela.

By Joe Russo

Former Socceroo coach, Rale Rasic, has come to the defence of Mark Viduka and taken a swipe at the Australian Soccer Association for their lack of compassion towards the Leeds Utd striker.

Speaking on Sunday Night Soccer on radio 98.5 FM (every Sunday in NSW at 10.00pm) Rasic, the only person to have guided the Socceroos in a World Cup, condemned the ASA for their stance against Viduka.

"I understand the rules but rules are made to be broken. Human understanding is above the rules," Rasic said.

"My view is that the ASA should have acted in the same way as Leeds did. Not many players in the last 10 years have been more loyal than Mark Viduka to the Socceroos. Viduka has been made unfairly a black sheep"

Leeds Utd came in for praise from Rasic because of their compassionate treatment of Viduka when he requested three weeks leave to be with his sick father in Melbourne.

It was well known that Viduka wanted to repay Leeds for their loyalty and compassion, especially since the club was going to face Man Utd only a few days later.

"Compassionate grounds mean to me the way Leeds Utd acted. It was with total understanding in the most difficult stage of the club's history in the last 20 years because they are facing relegation.

"To release a player on compassionate grounds showed an absolutely fantastic understanding of the player's situation," said Australia's 1974 World Cup coach.

The ASA was criticised for their lack of compassion and for not following the Leeds Utd example. According to Rasic a lot more would have been achieved if there was a better understanding of the case. "There was an option to use compassionate grounds in the case of Viduka and this is where the human side takes over the rules of FIFA or any other association.

"Shouldn't they know Mark Viduka and his problem? Shouldn't they assist him with the situation?

"Love for his parents is above football. You cannot compare his father to football. I think that if we had acted humanly towards the situation then we would have achieved so much more."

Frank Farina's power was also questioned by Rasic. The ASA has instructed Farina to pick his best team at all times thus virtually limiting his power and discretion in selection matters.

The ASA needs to be commended in general for taking a hard line but whether Viduka should be made a scapegoat is the point in question.

Given that other players pulled out of the Venezuela-Australia game in Caracas using medical certificates, only to play for their European clubs three days later, has left a lot of people wondering about the value of being honest.

It would appear that Viduka, who honestly admitted that he would like to repay Leeds for their understanding a few weeks earlier, may have been better off claiming he was injured and obtaining a medical certificate thus avoiding any ASA and FIFA sanction.

" I personally think that coaching the team and understanding the players should be in the first place the responsibility of Frank Farina," said Rasic who had a lot more autonomy and power in his days as Socceroo coach.

"I read and understand from today's paper, and I'm absolutely shattered by it, that they have turned Farina into a lame duck. Who has done that?

"Frank should have established who are the players that mean business and who he can rely on because, if he doesn't know who is Mark Viduka by now, then he must have a problem."

Rasic questioned Harry Kewell's commitment to the Socceroos and made it clear that if Kewell was a player in his day, then total loyalty would have been expected.

The rapport between coach and player was of paramount importance and a player's word was final. A transparent policy was based on a gentleman's agreement whereby the player was upfront with the coach.

"If Kewell picks up the telephone and tells Frank that he is injured then that is the end of the story in my opinion. We accept the player's word.

"But if Kewell double crossed me once, then he would never get that jersey back. I wouldn't care how good a player he is.

"Just count the number of matches that he has played for Australia and how one match after the other he is playing the game with everybody. It is taken like a joke and I personally think it is a joke," said Rasic.

1974 Socceroos Johnny Warren and Ray Richards have also voiced their opinions on the issue. Warren in particular, in his role as a soccer media personality, has been criticised from some quarters.

However, Rasic, their former Socceroo coach, strongly supported both Warren and Richards and even commended their outspoken stance.

"Ray Richards spoke out against it and so too did Johnny Warren who was particularly strong [on the issue] in the Canberra Times last week about the situation.

" I applaud Richards and Warren because they had the courage to stand up and be counted when it is a question of the country.

"What these two gentlemen said is absolutely perfectly right. If any player has doubt, picking and choosing when he is going to play for Australia, then I don't think that these players are needed.

Sunday Night Soccer airs at weekly at 10.00pm every Sunday on radio 98.5 FM in NSW.

SOUTH MELBOURNE CROWNED SOUTHERN YOUTH LEAGUE CHAMPIONS

South Melbourne Youth have been crowned the 2003/2004 Southern Division Champions after a convincing 3-1 Grand Final victory against arch rivals Melbourne Knights Youth.

In front of a healthy crowd at Jack Edwards Reserve, South Melbourne was in control for the majority of the match and took the game to the Knights from the outset.

After just 5 minutes of play, South Melbourne took the lead through Ibrahim Ibraimi. There were no further goals in the first half and South went into the break with a slender lead. The Knights again lost concentration and conceded their second goal for the match inside the first 5 minutes of the restart. It was Jordan Lando, who extended Southâs seemingly unassailable lead. It was Lando again who put the icing on the cake, with a third goal in the 70th minute, which dispelled any Knights comeback.

A late consolation goal by the leagues leading goalscorer Omar Ayache was not enough, and it was the Minor Premiers South Melbourne Youth who took out the match 3-1 and the title of Southern Division Champions for season 2003/2004.

South Melbourne Youth will have the opportunity to compete in this years NYL Grand Final when they take on the eventual winner of the Northern Division (NYL) at a later date to be confirmed by the Australian Soccer Association.

Nwaogazi Dreams Socceroos

Wolves goal-machine Chima Nwaogazi wants to one day don the green and gold jersey rather than his native Nigerian outfit.

'Smiling assassin' Chimaobi Nwaogazi wants to play for Australia.

The 24-year-old Wollongong Wolves Nigerian import has chosen the Socceroos ahead of the Super Eagles.

"Where ever I am is where my future is." He said.

"I love Australia. I love Nigeria too. But my heart and soul are here. I'm attracted to Australia because I love their set up and I 'm dreaming of one day playing for Australia in a World Cup finals if all things being equal."

Nwaogazi who is one of the leading scorers in this year's National Soccer League was on the verge of playing for Nigeria at the close of 2000 when he finished runners-up in the Pepsi League. But the urge to play international football ended that dream as Sydney Olympic football club sponsored him to come to Australia. "I have really enjoyed myself playing in the NSL for the first time. My performance worts all the initial problems I had." He said.

"I was given the opportunity and I'm happy that I proved myself. So, I can say that this is a great year for me. I thank Wollongong Wolves. If I'm also given the chance to play for Australia, I believe that I will continue from where I stopped.

"I was devastated when Australia lost to Uruguay in the last World Cup. I'm praying for the Socceroos to make it this time around. And all hands must be on deck to make Germany 2006 a reality."

Remarkably, the ever- smiling Nigerian scored six goals in six matches to break the Wolves record for goals in consecutive matches. He failed to equal the national record of seven goals in seven games.

Nwaogazi joined Wollongong Wolves from the Melbourne team Fawkner Blues, where he scored nine goals in a couple of games playing in the Victorian Premier League.

Meanwhile a ridiculous rule that stops local premier league clubs having more than one NSL player will see Chima, who has scored 10 goals in his debut season and won the hearts of South Coast soccer fans, being prevented from playing for the club of his choice, and probably heading to the Sydney or Newcastle winter competitions.

"It is totally stupid" said Chris Tanner of Zenith Football Management.

The ISA president tells me that even though David Cervinski has retired from NSL football, he carries the tag of NSL player for two years, stopping Chima from joining Cringila Lions. No wonder Illawarra soccer is imploding and more ISA clubs are looking to the NSW competitions."

"(ISA President) Dave Naylor says that this rule is designed to keep clubs equal, but if keeping clubs equal means that only 14 NSL players can play in the Illawarra, then the Illawarra league is nothing more than a glorified All Age competition. The Wolves have unearthed some stars this year, and some are prevented from staying here in the off-season. Surely retaining better players is good for the region, and the junior ranks as well ? It's nothing short of madness."

Nwaogazi needs to maintain his relationship with the Wolves until the expiration of his current sporting visa, and Cringila offered to provide him with an extension of his soccer life in Wollongong.

"It now looks like the Wolves will have to loan him to an out-of-town club. How absurd." said Tanner.

"Why should players look to live and play their trade in the Illawarra when this sort of amateur atitude exists? Chima wants to call Illawarra home, but this now looks quite difficult to maintain."

Not surprisingly, Nwaogazi has recieved offers from other NSL clubs for next season, but has opted to wait for a short while to see an offer from the Wolves first.

National Soccer League

Perth Glory 2
Marconi Stallions 2

By Richard Kreider

Perth Glory was given a reality check at Members Equity Stadium last Saturday, one that saw Marconi Stallions come extremely close to producing a shock result.

Joe Spiteri had the Sydneysiders cruising with a classy goal in each half of the final home and away fixture, ahead of the playoffs, before a late surge enabled the newly-crowned National Soccer League Premiers to scramble two goals of their own.

Clearly, Marconi boss Jean-Paul de Marigny has nurtured a dynamic set of players who show sufficient talent to go all the way this season, let alone what they are capable of in 2004-05.

"They (Marconi) are the dark horse of the competition and I certainly wouldn't want to play them at this point of the season," said d'Avray.

"We chased shadows in the first half and were fortunate to be just the one goal down. Then when you are two-nil down you think the game is over, but this is a gritty Perth Glory team and I thought we came back well and showed a lot of character. In the end, I'm happy to get the point," d'Avray said.

The draw prevented the Perth side from being the first ever club to win all home games in a NSL season, but that didn't disappoint the Glory camp too much, after receiving the Premiership trophy and medals just before the Stallions clash kicked off.

"It would have been nice but it just wasn't to be," said d'Avray on the record which remains safe and sound for another season. "The team has still done tremendously well not to lose at home."

For Marconi, it was a quality display of among other things, possession football; one that was refreshingly entertaining against intimidating opposition.

"We had to make some forced changes, so to come here and dominate like we did – I'm very proud of the kids," said de Marigny.

After a difficult chance went begging to Glory's Tom Pondeljak in the 8th minute, the ominous signs of what Marconi were capable of came three minutes later when Spiteri was placed goal bound with ease. Perth keeper Jason Petkovic prevented what should have been the opening goal by sprinting from his line to shrink the lethal forwards strike zone.

Alex Brosque, arguably one of Australia's rising talents, didn't waste any time in introducing himself to the Perth rearguard. His vision and delivery qualities were a treat to watch, as was the silky dribbling skills of young Nick Carle.

Contrary to past encounters at the WA ground, it was the opposition who controlled the game with a classy exhibition of one-touch possession football that clearly irritated the home side.

However, such is the level of talent in the Glory team; they were still able to carve out their own openings on the Marconi goal, which had stand-in keeper Stacy Alogdellis being given a rare start.

Perth's midfield genius Pondeljak brought the best out of the youngster in the 17th minute with a thunderous waist-high volley from the face of the box that was superbly palmed away - and amply applauded by the 10,458 in attendance.

'Simply the best' – Glory players celebrate their Minor Premiership win. (Photo By Richard Kreider)

The Marconi's response to this proved deadly, when a poor left-side throw-in from Mark Byrnes in the 21st minute was claimed by Brosque. He immediately split the Perth backline to place Spiteri in with another clear opportunity on goal where this time, he didn't fail. Petkovic managed to get his right glove to the grass-level strike but not enough to prevent the ball from trickling over the goal-line.

The second period was just 35 seconds old when Damian Mori clipped a Bobby Despotovski centre over the bar and six minutes later Glory defender Jamie Harnwell forced a ball through a maze of players onto an upright.

But with the Premiers still goalless after 56 minutes, d'Avray decided to make a tactical change by bringing on Nicky Mrdja for a surprisingly flat Despotovski and Adrian Caceres for Gary Faria.

The move added bite up front but the visitor's great wall of Dominic Longo, Michael Thwaite, Todd Brodie and Ange Costanzo was persistently hard to penetrate.

Glory's next opportunity to equalise was in the 63rd minute when a deep Jade North cross off the right picked out Byrnes lurking at the back stick. The defender climbed high and headed the ball goalwards, but incredibly Chad Gibson and Brodie combined to scoop the ball away.

Spiteri replied six minutes later with another gilt-edged chance, when a lung-bursting solo run was completed with a 20 metre strike that looked headed for the far reaches of the net. But Petkovic proved yet again why he is rated among the best keepers in the League with a world-class save, using his fingertips to push the ball away.

Marconi's second goal came in the 76th minute when Spiteri's pace left both Harnwell and Shaun Murphy in his wake, before he slipped the ball past the oncoming Petkovic for a classy conversion, which earned genuine applause from the Shed supporters.

The Perth resurgence came seven minutes before the end, by way of a right-side centre from substitute Jamie Coyne which was dummied by Mrdja and Mori wasted little time in firing the ball past Alogdellis' right hand from six metres.

Three minutes later, the crowd brought the roof down when the ball initially squirmed away from an aerial dual between Mori and Alogdellis. Mrdja was in the perfect place to pounce on the loose ball and drill it between defender and upright for his sixth goal this season, coming off the bench.

With confidence sky-high, Glory made a last-ditch effort to steal a win but it wasn't to be and referee Eddie Lennie, who was sporting an extremely short haircut because of a charity pledge, blew for full-time.

The only downside to Marconi's performance was what could be a bad knee injury to defender Simon Bell, who slumped to the ground following an innocuous challenge a minute into the second-half.

"I thought we made a statement out there," said a satisfied de Marigny, despite throwing away a seemingly unbeatable two-goal lead. "Don't forget we have had a massive workload but we will be ready for South Melbourne next week."

Kingz 4
Brisbane Strikers 3

It goes into the record books as 'a victory, their fourth of the season, but the Football Kingz National Soccer League win over Brisbane Strikers last Sunday in Auckland was memorable for a lot more than the result.

It was the first time this season they had scored four goals and the result took them ahead of their worst season, in 2001-02, when they won just three.

However, coach Tommy Mason was the first to admit they only got the points following one of the worst refereeing decisions imaginable.

With ten minutes to play and the score locked at 3-3, Kingz striker Tallan Martin and Brisbane goalkeeper Corey Baldock, running away from the goal, chased a harmless ball as it crossed the goal line.

With no chance either player would get to it, Baldock, with absolutely no intent, might have clipped Martin.

Both players fell but then turned in amazement to see referee Derek Rugg pointing to the penalty spot.

Harry Ngata beat Baldock to complete the scoring.

It was the second time Rugg had awarded the Kingz a penalty. The first, in the 45th minute, was just as controversial – for different reasons.

Ngata was stopped in his tracks by Brisbane player-coach Stu McLaren inside the penalty area. Rugg pointed, Ngata converted for 2-1 but only after Kingz players remonstrated with Rugg – incensed McLaren was not sent off or even booked.

"I should have gone. I would have had no complaint if he had sent me," McLaren said later.

"He (Rugg) has often left me wondering with some of his decisions.

"I don't blame him entirely. I blame those people who keep giving him the whistle."

The game, with nothing on it for either team, produced seven goals but not a lot else.

"The score flattered us," Mason said.

"It was the end of the season for us and we obviously wanted to win but for the first 30 minutes they were running the show.

"Then, all of a sudden we came in (at halftime) 2-1 ahead."

The Brisbane Strikers now face Adelaide United in the finals series playoffs for a chance to play either the Perth Glory or the Power in this years NSL finals

McLaren and his young squad have had quite a good season to date after proving many critics wrong by making the finals.

SBS TO BROADCAST NSL FINALS

The Australian Soccer Association last week announced that the 2003/04 National Soccer League Championship Series will be broadcast live on SBS TV.

Under the arrangements SBS TV will broadcast a match live every Sunday during the NSL Championship Series culminating in live coverage of the Grand Final on Sunday 4 April.

Televised matches will commence each Sunday at 3.45pm (EST) with the Grand Final at 3pm (EST).

NSL General Manager Stefan Kamasz said, "The NSL is extremely pleased that the clubs and fans will have an opportunity to see television coverage of what promises to be another high-quality Championship Series.

Les Murray: Head of SBS Sport was delighted with the capture of the NSL Finals Series.

"We are also grateful to SBS TV for their support and have no doubt that they will provide a typically first-rate broadcast with all Australian soccer fans set to benefit from the television coverage."

SBS Head of Sport Les Murray said, "It is very pleasing for SBS to resume being the broadcaster for the National Soccer League in what will be it's final flurry.

"SBS was the broadcasting partner of the NSL for the best part of 18 years and I guess it is fitting that we shall be part of it's swan-song.

"We look forward to a feast of football."

Last year saw the finals previewed on channel 31 on Foxtel – Pay TV.

National Soccer League

Northern Spirit 2
Adelaide United 1

A player who was just one year old when Alex Tobin's National Soccer League career started last Sunday afternoon ensured the venerable defender enjoyed what was almost certainly his last game.

A brace of goals to 21-year-old striker Adam Kwasnik gave Northern Spirit a 2-1 victory in their final NSL game after the club was wound up earlier this week.

While coach Laurie McKinna and some of the Spirit players may yet be part of a new franchise on the NSW central coast, they face a nervous wait to see whether the proposed team will be part of next season's revamped national competition.

"Everybody is in limbo now and I don't think it's fair on anybody," McKinna said.

Tobin, who started his senior domestic career with Adelaide City back in 1984 on Sunday extended NSL appearance record to 522 games.

Although he didn't rule out possibly playing a couple more next year, the 38-year-old central defender and former Socceroo captain suggested after the Adelaide match that it was his likely swansong.

"For now, it's the finish, and I'll play it by ear the next few months," Tobin said.

Dozens of Spirit supporters among the 2009 crowd swarmed onto Pittwater Park at the end of the game.

Tobin served the game well in all aspects as a player and ambassador for the code. Close sources suggest it won't be the end of the big number five's career but for now, it's going to be a bit of a holiday for the former Socceroo skipper.

Kwasnik ensured they had something to celebrate after notching a goal in each half with his 69th minute winner coming through a header looped over stand-in goalkeeper Robert Bajic.

One of Tobin's former Adelaide City club mates and ex-Socceroo Aurelio Vidmar threatened to spoil the party when he curled in a 20 metre free kick just before halftime.

Kwasnik restored Spirit's lead and went close to increasing it on a couple of occasions.

Former Sydney Olympic striker Elias Demourtzidis twice went close to scoring for Adelaide, but United coach John Kosmina substituted Vidmar and Michael Valkanis early in the second half to ensure they would be available for next week's match against Brisbane in the opening round of the finals – tactics that would have helped the South Australians cause for a hopeful finals berth in their first year in the NSL.

Veteran midfielder Vidmar, who made his NSL debut just a year after Tobin, was booked just a few seconds before scoring the equaliser.

Adelaide were already assured of third spot before their loss to the Spirit, just the sixth in the debut season.

McKinna said while the mood of the players had changed from day to day during recent weeks, victory today and last week against South Melbourne proved they had talent.

He said they would meet this week with the liquidator about money they were still owed, but made it clear there had never been any talk of not fulfilling today's fixture.

"We just wanted to finish off what we started and it was good to finish on a win," McKinna said.

Spirit's victory combined with other final results lifted the club two places to seventh.

Kosmina expected to have pretty much a full strength roster for this week's match against a Brisbane side he thought would provide tough opposition.

"The pressure is on (minor premiers) Perth, more than it is anybody else, possibly (second placed) Parramatta to a slightly lesser extent," said Kosmina looking toward the finals.

Source - AAP

Urukalo Now Wins African Super Cup

By John Economos

Australia's globetrotting coach Michael Urukalo, currently based in Nigeria, recently won his second major trophy, the African Super Cup when his Club, Enyimba F.C. defeated Tunisian side Etoile F.C. 1-0 in a tight and torrid battle.

Urukalo stated to *ABSW*: "I have just won the biggest prize in African Football, 'The African Super Cup', and no team has ever won it that had also won the African Champions League which we did. Our victory will go down in African Football history", proudly boasted the former Apia, heidelberg and Sydney Olympic Youth coach.

Urukalo's team dominated the first half, hungerily seeking a goal as Etoile FC played defensively trying to catch the Nigerians on the counter. The goal came mid way through the first half scored by Bob Usim an inspirational midfield player as well as a member of the Nigerian National Team.

In the second half the Tunisians bombarded the Nigerians and only heroic saves from Nigerian U/23s National Team goalkeeper Dele Aiyenugba,denied them an equaliser.

Urukalo lost his valuable central defender Obina Nwaneri when sent off for a second yellow card offence late in the second half.

Urukalo reflected to *ABSW*: "The last ten minutes seemed like 10 hours, the hardest 10 minutes of my entire coaching career as Etoile FC is an excellent football team with four of their players being members of the Tunisian National Team which recently won the African Nations Cup.

"The biggest advantage they had over us was that they were match hardened as they have been playing in the Arab Cup. In contrast our last real competitive match was last December 12th when we won the Champions' League Final.

Urukalo caused much controversy when before this vital match he dropped from his line-up Vincent Eyeanma, Nigeria's Number one goalkeeper who had just been voted the Number One custodian in the whole of Africa.

Michael Urukalo: Picked up yet another title with Enyimba F.C.

This goalie plus an internationakl defender, were both dropped by Urukalo for arriving late at a training camp showing little interest to their task of preparation.

The Aussie coach went on to comment to *ABSW*: "Personally it has been a great victory, to win the biggest prize available in African Football.

"I just hope that Soccer people back home, (Australia), appreciate this,(victorious results), and sit up and take some real notice of my results abroad over recent years."

Urukalo had won the Nigerian Super Cup and now the African Super Cup.

Sydney Olympic 0
South Melbourne 0

By Peter Damalas

It was an anti-climactic end to the National Soccer League at OKI Jubilee Stadium on Sunday, as Sydney Olympic and South Melbourne played out a scoreless draw.

A decent crowd of 3,682 people witnessed what was perhaps the last fixture played by the home side in a national league, with thoughts in the terraces turning towards where Olympic will be playing next season.

On the field, there was not enough incentive for both sides to come out with guns blazing.

Olympic's finals aspirations were dashed at Parramatta Stadium last week, and they were playing for pride, while South Melbourne would finish in fourth position with a win. Their finals opponents (Marconi Stallions) was already determined, and the only matter at stake was who would host the first leg.

No love-loss shown between Marcus Sterglopoulos and Zenon Caravella (Mid-Air) in the traditional derby between Olympic and South Melbourne.

The home side dictated play for the majority of the first half, and they created more chances.

In the 13th minute, Hiroyuki Ishida cut the ball across from the left into the path of Zenon Caravella, whose initial shot was blocked by the feet of Souths goalkeeper Eugene Galekovic, before he spurned the second attempt.

Another Ishida cross from the left found Iain Fyfe, but the midfielder could not direct his header goalwards, and the ball flew over the bar from close range.

Young Socceroo Vince Lia shot wide with the away team's best opportunity of the half. Lia had collected a pass from 17 year old midfielder Kristian Sarkies, and he did the hard yards, cutting through the heart of the Olympic defence before striking the ball wide of the left hand upright.

The blustery conditions did nothing for the spectacle, nor did Olympic's long range shooting and crossing. On one occasion however, a long cross from Predrag Bojic eventually found opposite flanker Joseph Schirripa, who controlled the ball before shooting directly at Galekovic, who saved with ease.

The second half was played in much the same fashion as the first, with both sides spurning the chances that were created.

Sarkies blasted over from close range five minutes into the second period following a cross from Michael Panopoulos.

As Caravella limped off the field in the 58th minute, his teams hopes of claiming a win went with him. The twenty year old was instrumental in the attacking third, and he is developing as an impressive leader.

It was up to the likes of Halpin and Juric to push their team forward.

Olympic's captain played Pablo Cardozo in, but from a tight angle, the striker could only find Galekovic, and not the back of the net.

With the minutes ticking away, both teams came out with a last-ditch attempt to win the game. Substitutes Massimo Murdocca and Paul Trimboli combined to give the former a strike at goal, which was well held by custodian Brett Hughes. With Olympic's next breakaway, Ishida laid the ball off for substitue Tarek Elrich (younger brother of Socceroo Ahmad), who could not capitalise.

Coach Peter Papanikitas gave Elrich and Richard Cardozo a chance off the bench in this final match of the season.

While South Melbourne prepare to tackle Marconi in the finals series, Sydney Olympic will reflect on 27 years of involvement in the national league, an involvement which concluded on Sunday afternoon.

National Soccer League

Melbourne Knights 0
Sydney United 0

'Knights till the end' - Supporters show their appreciation towards their beloved players after a teary last game at the Knights Stadium.

By Alan Clark

Melbourne Knights and Sydney United played out a scoreless draw at Knights Stadium on Sunday evening concluding their 2003/2004 seasons in uninspiring style.

It was a match where the wrapping proved to be more valuable than the contents.

Labinot Haliti could have won it for United at the death after a break led by substitute whiz-kid Anthony Doumanis who fed a ball wide to the left for fellow substitute Liam Austin to cross. Haliti met it low down at the far post, and his shot seemed certain to sneak in at the foot of the post except for a fine intervention from Knights, goalkeeper Tommi Tomich.

It was a game that failed to catch alight, despite the hopes of the sizable Somers Street attendance hoping to farewell its team in style.

"You'd have thought those boys coming off the ground had lost a Grand Final today," said Knights, coach Ian Dobson after the game. "Tears were shed by more than half-a-dozen of them."

There was little at stake in this Round 26 game, save for boasting rights within the Croatian-Australian communities of Melbourne and Sydney as neither side could make the Finals.

Knights, season was calamitous by its lofty standards of just a few short years before, and United had fallen just shy of making the six after a surprisingly long run as a contender.

Stadium security took a circumspect approach to the lighting of flares many of which were set off well before the players had entered the arena even for their pre-match warm-up.

"In European football, flares are used in many many stadiums, and we are dealing with a European culture here," said Dobson.

"(But) the game can not stand still. We've got to go forward. If part of that is casualties (of clubs like the Knights) then that,s how it,s got to be. That's life."

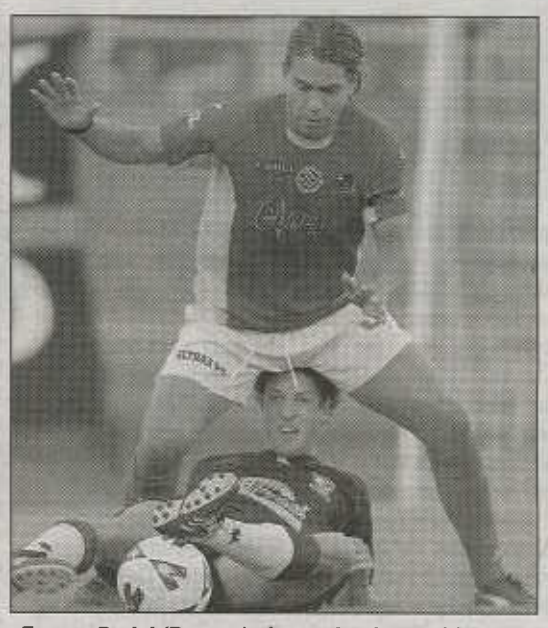
On the park, despite all the incentive the players had in taking things easy, it was clear that there was a level of intensity in the early exchanges.

A clash of heads as early as the tenth minute between Knights, Steve Pantelidis and United's Marko Filipovic saw both leave the field for treatment, and Pantelidis,subsequent replacement midway through the half.

It was a sensible move as Pantelidis had suffered a concussion just a few weeks beforehand, and there was no need to expose him to further risk.

Knights perhaps had the better of the first-half, United the second.

A strong wind blowing up the park was perhaps the reason for the balance changing at the break, but there was little in it either way.



Franco Parisi (Bottom) shows that he could get the ball no matter what the situation against Knights skipper Rody Vargas.

"I thought we were very competitive," said Dobson. "We were quite aggressive to start off with and I felt we dominated the first half. (Then) we slipped away and became a bit disoriented."

Mark Rudan had spurned an excellent opportunity from a well-flighted Antony Zmirc corner when in the clear, but his attempted header failed to connectfrom close-range.

Anthony Pelikan had a solo run up the inside left channel skipping by two ineffective challenges along the way only to run out of room and cramp his shooting space.

Daniel Vasilevski found the ball rebounding his way but he too took overly-long and the chance disappeared.

With both sides playing five-man midfields, there was little time and space for creative play, and what chances arose, were come by fitfully and in a disjointed manner.

Just before the break, two sharp chances fell Knights, way. First, Henry Fa'Arodo found himself with time to shoot, and passed by United goalkeeper Liam Reddy who assessed it was passing by the post as well. Pelikan had continued his chase only just failing to steer it in as the angle defeated him. Then only a minute later Andy Vargas bent a 25 metre free-kick around the wall only for the ball to crash off the bar with Reddy well-beaten. The ball rebounded onto the now prone Reddy's back but over the bye-line for the corner.

The goal opportunities were even rarer in the second period.

Midway through the half Joe Vrkic sent a through-ball for Franco Parisi to run onto. Parisi's left foot shot was on-target, but Tomich stretched out a hand to block and allow his defence to mop up.

Tomich kept out United at the death on two occasions the first to mystify Haliti, then moments later touching over the bar a Zmirc free-kick.

When the final whistle blew, it was the signal for the joyous invasion of the ground by supporters of both teams who chaired their heroes off the arena in the best of spirits.

"It was a great day for the Croatian community today," said

Dobson. "(Even) anyone who was not Croatian here today couldn't fail to be emotionally charged and (to have) felt something for the club."

Wollongong Wolves 3
Newcastle United 0

Wollongong Wolves thrashed Newcastle United in last Sunday evening's final-round NSL clash at WIN Stadium, but the Wolves are now praying soccer's new administrators don't blow fulltime on the club.

NSL champions in 2000 and 2001, the Wolves have struggled for support in recent years and faced a battle to win a place in next season's revamped competition.

The task ahead is sure to be more formidable than what an injury-riddled Newcastle provided as opposition tonight.

Both teams were out of playoff contention weeks ago but the Wolves finished the season positively.

Wollongong were two up after just 19 minutes and their keeper Andrew Crews had one of his quietest nights of the season as Newcastle ended the campaign having failed to score in their last five games, all losses.

Wollongong's first two goals came from Nick Sabljak corners.

Wolves striker Chima Nwaogazi drifted between defenders to head Wollongong ahead on 10 minutes.

It was the Nigerian striker's 12th goal of the campaign, a stunning return for a player in his first NSL season.

Already claiming the hearts of many fans in the South Coast, it is going to be a real dog-fight to see who could possibly land the big Nigerian if the Wolves aren't granted a spot in next year's APL.

Ten minutes later, another Sabljak corner and a second Wolves goal.

Skipper and veteran marksman Stuart Young showed his goal poacher's instinct, on hand to scramble the ball home after Newcastle twice cleared off the line.

Wollongong were comfortable 2-0 leaders at half-time and Nwaogazi should have made it 3-0 early in the second half but shot wide with only the keeper to beat.

Newcastle never stopped trying and Crews was twice forced to save at the feet of tricky winger Robbie Middleby.

Newcastle forced a few corners and gave Wollongong a couple of anxious moments but in truth never looked like repairing the early damage.

Seven minutes from full-time, end of season recruit Sabljak was rewarded for a fine game with the Wolves' third goal. Adam Hughes won the ball in midfield, it fell to replacement Tanju Balabanel, who presented Sabljak with an easy chance.

A season-best 3531 fans farewelled the Wolves with the players completing a lap of honour after the match. Wolves coach John Turner said it was an emotional time for the club.

"It's the last time this group of players will be together," Turner said.

"We've been through a lot together this season and who really knows what the future holds.

"One thing for sure, the players showed against Newcastle that Wollongong deserves a place in the competition next season.

"We were really determined to finish the season positively and put on a good show at home.

"I think we did that tonight."

Skipper Young who played in both Wollongong championship winning years hopes the club will be around next season.

"This is a strong soccer area and I'm sure the fans will get behind the team if we are in the comp.

"The fans showed tonight how much soccer means to this area."

Source – AAP

POWER TO SHUT IN APRIL

Parramatta Power General Manager Angela Travis exclusively revealed to *ABSW* last week that as of the 23rd of April, the entire staff and playing squad will be made redundant shadowing possible plans of a Power revival.

Travis stated her disappointment at this event as the Power GM felt as though the club had the credentials to go anywhere.

"Its sad to see the club leave a year before bigger things are expected for the National League. Overall I've enjoyed my time at the Power, I've made a lot of new friends and it was wonderful working with a good bunch of players who not only gave 100% for the club on the field, but off it as well".

During its five-year stint in the NSL, the Power has made the Semi-Finals twice, including this year.

One disappointment that the club endured was the fact that no real fan base was built during its five-year operation.

It will be a dog fight to see who will claim the quality signing's of NSL's top goal-scorer Ante Milicic, Andre Gumprecht, Simon Colosimo, Fernando Rech, Sasho Petrovski and Clint Bolton to name a few of the star players currently on Parramatta's books.

Whatever the case, Parramatta have always conducted themselves on a professional manner and have been one of the only clubs that have run their clubs the right way.

Rumours that the Mount Pritchard Social Club was set to take over the squad circulated the fields but Travis made it quite clear – "The Power will be gone".

An in-depth interview on the only female representative in the competition this year will be seen in next week's *ABSW*.

BYE - PARRAMATTA POWER

SOCCERWOMAN by Janene Mar

NORTH KOREA TAKES AUSTRALIA CUP CROWN AHEAD OF MATILDAS

Tue 24 February 2004

DPR Korea won the Australia Cup, rounding out the week-long tournament last Tuesday night with a double-figures victory over New Zealand, whilst the Matildas' scoreless draw against China gave the home side second place.

Australia were unable to record a win for themselves to finish off, after failing to score from two successive chances from the penalty spot in the second half.

The Matildas' hopes of winning a fourth Australia Cup title had been all but dashed when the impressive North Korean outfit, level on points with Australia going into the day, defeated New Zealand 11-0 in the early match at Brisbane's QEII Stadium.

Nevertheless, the new-look Australian side took the field full of confidence against the youthful China, but for all their dominance of possession throughout the match, found it difficult to penetrate an opponent which got behind the ball well. At the other end, China enjoyed few chances to attack the Australian goal.

Australia's best chances of the first half came in the opening period of play, Sarah Walsh hitting wide from a good opportunity in the 11th minute. Katie Gill then produced the best chance of the match from open play in the 17th minute, unlucky not to see her 20 metre dipping strike from a Tal Karp cutback crash against the crossbar with the goalkeeper beaten.

Six minutes later, Gill beat her marker to a ball in from the right, but her first-time attempt from 16 metres flew skywards. Australia continued to hold the upper hand, but the finishing touch eluded them.

Striker Lisa De Vanna had three attempts early in the second half to break the deadlock for Australia, but still no reward as the Chinese goalkeeper met the challenge.

The match then took a dramatic turn when Australia was awarded a penalty in the 73rd minute after substitute Selin Kuralay was taken down in the right hand side of the box. Joanne Peters stepped up for the spot kick, but the captain's attempt was well saved by keeper Weng Xiaojie low down to her right. The Matildas received a reprieve with the referee directing that the penalty be retaken as the Chinese had encroached upon the first penalty.

Amidst the protesting Chinese, youngster Kuralay took it upon herself to take the second spot kick. Her kick cracked against the left post, eluded the goalkeeper and flew across the face of goal and struck the right post, and Kuralay drilled the rebound into the back of the net. However, the goal was disallowed as no other player had made contact with the ball, meaning only a player other than the original penalty taker could finish off the chance.

Five minutes later, more drama unfolded. Another yellow card to China prompted further protests from the visitors, and play was delayed for a couple of minutes as the Chinese walked off, refusing to continue play.

Australia had a couple more chances to claim the lead towards the end of play, but in the end came close to conceding a late winner to China, but the Chinese shot was cleared off the line by substitute Leah Blayney.

Australian National Coach Adrian Santrac could find some positives from the game with the longer term success in mind. "It was a tough match. We're obviously disappointed not to have won the game, but a lot of experience was gained by our many new players. China is a very streetwise team, they defended in numbers and really tightened up in the defensive areas. You need to be very experienced to break down that sort of play."

"We should have scored from the penalty, and there were other opportunities to score. We were in the last 30 metres countless times, but where we needed composure and patience, at the moment these are areas which need refining. This is the reason why we have chosen these teams - they are the games we'll learn from. This is the type of opposition we need to play regularly."

In the early match tonight, DPR Korea showed exactly why they are the current Asian champions and the seventh-ranked team in the world. Their polished skill on the ball and crisp speed of movement was a class above the inexperienced New Zealand who had no answers to the Korean onslaught.

Ri Kum Suk opened the Korean account on the quarter-hour mark, picked out with a fantastic cross from the left and finishing with a drive from 15 metres. Seven minutes later, a missed attempt by the New Zealand last defender to head clear a long ball forward allowed Yun Yong Hui in with only the keeper to beat, slotting home from 12 metres. North Korea's next came in the 34th minute from a pinpoint corner kick which was met by a powerful header from Ri Hyang Ok.

The three-goal first half was followed up by a flurry of eight goals after the break by the North Korean maestros. Star striker Jin Pyol Hui produced a second half hattrick, whilst teammate Jong Pok Sim scored a pair in a game where the goals were shared between eight different players.

6TH AUSTRALIA CUP
18-24 February 2004
QEII Stadium, Brisbane, Australia

MATCH DAY THREE
Game Two
Tuesday 24 February 2004

Result:

AUSTRALIA 0
CHINA 0
Halftime score: 0-0

Kickoff: 7.30pm **Weather:** Warm, humid, light showers, 24°C **Pitch condition:** Damp, Very good flat grassy surface

Match Officials: Referee - Krystyna Szokolai, Assistant Referees - Jacqui Leleu, Airlie Keen, Fourth Official - Jacqui Melksham (all AUS)

AUSTRALIA Lineup: Cassandra Kell (GK), Karla Reuter, Dianne Alagich, Rhian Davies, Tal Karp (Leah Blayney 46'), Sarah Walsh (Gill Foster 57'), Kate McShea, Joanne Peters (capt), Lisa De Vanna, Amy Taylor, Katie Gill (Selin Kuralay 46').

Unused Substitutes: April Mann, Pam Grant, Melissa Barbieri (GK). (Lana Harch unavailable due to injury).

Cautions: Kuralay 81', Alagich 90+'.

Expulsions: nil

CHINA Lineup: Weng Xiaojie (GK), Gao Yan, Guo Lin, Wang Kun, Hou Iijia (capt), Fan Tingting, Xu Yuan (Wang Yihang 83'), Wang Dandan, Liu Sa (Lou Xiaoxu 90+'), Guo Yue, Sun Yongxia (Weng Xinzhi 90+').

Unused Substitutes: Li Shasha, You Jia, Zhang Wen, Hao Danyang (GK).

Cautions: Wang Kun 50', Guo Yue 73', Hou Iijia 73', Wang Dandan 78'.

Expulsions: nil

Katie Gill of Australia shields the ball from Yongxia Sun of China during the Australia Cup match between Australia and China.

MATCH DAY THREE
Game One
Tuesday 24 February 2004

Result:

DPR KOREA 11
(Ri Kum Suk 15', Yun Yong Hui 22', Ri Hyang Ok 34', O Kum Ran 47', Jin Pyol Hui 52', 62', 78', own goal 59', Jong Pok Sim 67', 71', Ri Un Gyong 75')
NEW ZEALAND 0
Halftime score: 3-0

Kickoff: 5.00pm **Weather:** Warm, humid, occasional rain, 26°C **Pitch condition:** Wet, Very good flat grassy surface **Match Officials:** Referee - Tammy Ogston, Assistant Referees - Sarah Ho, Rebecca Brose, Fourth Official - Jacqui Melksham (all AUS)

DPR KOREA Lineup: Ri Jong Hui (GK) (Chon Kyong Hwa 46'), Yun In Sil (Jon Hye Yong 46'), Ra Mi Ae (O Kum Ran 46), Ri Kum Suk (Jong Pok Sim 44'), Sok Chun Myong, Ho Sun Hui (Jin Pyol Hui 23'), Yun Yong Hui (Ri Un Gyong 46'), Jang Ok Gyong, Song Jong Sun, Pak Kyong Sun (Ri Hyang Ok 23'), Yang Kyong Hui.

Unused Substitutes: Nil, (Ineligible to play - So Yong Ran, Sin Kum Ok).

Cautions: Ri Hyang Ok 39'.

Expulsions: nil

NEW ZEALAND Lineup: Jenny Bindon (GK) (Rachel Howard 63'), Brooke Rangi (Sarah Gibbs 58'), Maia Jackman (Sara Clapham 74'), Rebecca Smith (capt) (Meisha Pyke 68'), Hayley Moorwood, Amber Hearn (Naomi Clarke 68'), Pip Meo (Zoe Thompson 38'), Simone Ferrara, Rebecca Simpson, Rebecca Sowden, Zarnia Cogle.

Unused Substitutes: Nil. (Priscilla Duncan - suspended)

Cautions: nil

Expulsions: nil

Final Points Table :

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
DPR Korea *	3	2	1	0	14	0	14	7
Australia *	3	1	2	0	2	0	2	5
China	3	1	1	1	3	3	0	4
New Zealand	3	0	0	3	0	16	-16	0

*Australia v DPR Korea match was abandoned due to adverse weather conditions. Nil result. Points shared for the purposes of the tournament standings, with nil goals recorded.

OLYMPICS START HERE

Straight on from Brisbane and the Australia Cup to Fiji where the Matildas' Olympic campaign kicks off with the OFC (Oceania) Women's Olympic Qualifying Tournament.

This is the first ever such Oceania Olympic qualifiers to be held, as previous Olympic Games finalist berths were awarded to the top placed nations from the previous year's FIFA Women's World Cup. For Athens 2004, teams will qualify via their Confederation's qualification tournament, meaning that all six confederations are guaranteed to be represented. Europe, due to the length of time it takes for them to complete a qualifying event, are the one exception, having since decided that their teams will be their top sides from the World Cup. The new format now gives everyone a separate equal chance of making the Olympics regardless of their form in the World Cup.

Oceania champions from all women's qualification tournaments since 1994, Australia enters this tournament as the clear favourites to claim the confederation's single direct berth to Athens 2004. Surprisingly, traditional rivals New Zealand have decided not to contest these Qualifiers, preferring to aim for success in 2008.

Australia competed in its first Olympic Games women's football tournament as host nation of the Sydney 2000 Olympics, and were joined by the top seven-placed quarterfinalists from the 1999 Women's World Cup. The Matildas finished 7th, our highest ever placing at a senior FIFA event, after a competitive showing. In the special atmosphere of a home Olympics, the underdog Australians narrowly missed advancing to the semifinals after giving away their first-half lead against Brazil in the last group match.

Women's football at the Olympic Games will be contested for the third time at Athens 2004, having first been accepted into the Olympic family for Atlanta 1996.

Four of the ten finalist nations for Athens 2004 are already known, including of course the automatic berth to hosts Greece. Europe's 2003 Women's World Cup finalists Germany and Sweden take up that continent's two spots to Athens. Brazil, ranked 6th in the world, have reportedly been awarded South America's single berth, despite having contested no qualification matches.

Along with Oceania, CONCACAF and Africa are both also in the midst of their qualifying tournaments at present. The lineup will be complete when Asia contests its qualifiers in April.

The allocation of berths to Athens 2004 between the six regional Confederations is as follows -

Confederation	*Finals Berths*
AFC (Asia)	2
CAF (Africa)	1
CONCACAF (Nth & Central Americas, Caribbean)	2
CONMEBOL (South America)	1
OFC (Oceania)	1
UEFA (Europe)	2
Host (Greece)	1
Totals	**10**

2004 OCEANIA WOMEN'S OLYMPIC QUALIFYING TOURNAMENT

Australia ~ Fiji ~ Papua New Guinea

MATCH SCHEDULE
GOVIND PARK, BA, FIJI

Round One
Tue 2 March 3.30pm Fiji v PNG
AUSTRALIA - Bye

Round Two
Thu 4 March 3:30pm AUSTRALIA v PNG
Fiji - Bye

Round Three
Sat 6 March 3.00pm Fiji v AUSTRALIA
Papua New Guinea - Bye

Fiji time is one hour ahead of AEST

The winner of the 2004 Oceania Women's Olympic Qualifying Tournament will represent the Oceania Football Confederation at the Athens 2004 Olympic Games women's football event, to be held 11-28 August 2004.

FIJI

This tournament will be Fiji's second participation in an Oceania qualification tournament, having first competed in the 1998 World Cup Qualifiers in Auckland where they reached the semifinals, before losing heavily to Papua New Guinea in the third place playoff.

Last year they competed in the South Pacific Games, their first international matches since the 1998 Qualifiers, finishing in 4th position after a tightly fought competition. During that campaign, Fiji went down narrowly to eventual gold medallists Papua New Guinea as well as to the fast-improving Guam. Hosted in Fiji, and the first time women's football had been included in the Games program, the Fijians had held high hopes of at least a medal. They will therefore need no further motivation when they face rivals Papua New Guinea in the opening match of these Qualifiers.

Fiji has only recently taken on the responsibility of host nation for this event after original host Cook Islands withdrew, followed by the withdrawal of second appointed host Vanuatu.

At the head of Fiji's Olympic campaign is National Coach Tony Buesnel, who spent most of his coaching career in Australia. Buesnel has had the team together in a residential training camp environment at the national academy for the last four weeks in preparation for these qualifiers.

Papua New Guinea are the only developing women's football nation to have competed in every senior Oceania women's qualifying tournament to date. Papua New Guinea were also proud hosts of the second Women's World Cup Qualifiers held in 1994.

For the first two World Cup Qualifiers (1991 and 1994), Papua New Guinea bravely took on the two big guns New Zealand and Australia on their own, in what were both three-nation tournaments. Despite losing to several large scorelines, Papua New Guinea, to their credit, were not discouraged and continued to grow from this international experience.

Their improvement was clearly in evidence when they lost to New Zealand by just 0-2 in 1994. Likewise, in 1998 when six teams participated in the Qualifiers, Papua New Guinea stamped their mark on the event with an emphatic 7-1 win over Fiji in the playoff for third place. Papua New Guinea again placed third at the 2003 World Cup Qualifiers.

At last year's South Pacific Games in Fiji, Papua New Guinea became the Games' first ever women's soccer gold medallists.

Letters to the Editor/Giveaways

SOCCER SKILLS GIVE-A-WAY

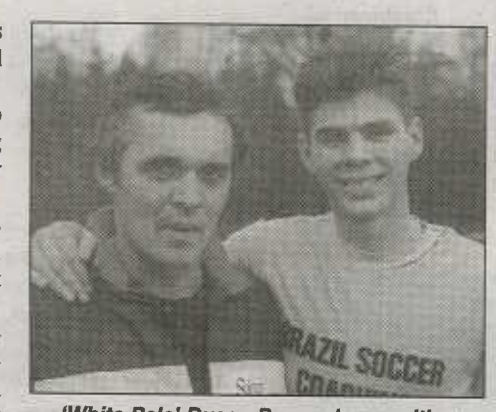
Former Yugoslav superstar Dusan Purac has recently released an instructional video titled ready, set, goal.

To celebrate the release of Dusan's second video *Australian & British Soccer Weekly* will be offering readers a chance to win Dusan's first video Soccer Skills.

Dusan has been a skills coach for over twenty years and strives to teach youngsters to get a feel for the ball so they can perform the breathtaking maneuvers that Zidane so regularly thrills his fans with.

The video also emphasizes Dusan's other philosophies; that soccer skills must be developed in childhood and hard work and perseverance are essential in developing skills and becoming a more proficient soccer player.

For 40 mins Dusan and several boys take us through basic skills such as dribbling, as well as crossing, and step-overs. The video originally released in 1988 features a young Zvonimir Boban and Dejan Savicevic dazzling us with the ball control skills that saw them both become key members of the AC Milan's legendary European Cup winning team of the early 90's.



'White Pele' Dusan Purac shown with a young AC Milan star Zvonimir Boban.

Also Inter's Darko Dancev, former European top junior of the year also features in the Soccer Skills video.

For your chance to win one of four of these great videos simply answer the question, who did AC Milan defeat in last season's Champions League final.

Send your answers to *ABSW*'s email address on absw007@hotmail.com titled 'Dusan Purac Competition'.

Good Luck

This weeks winner Kerry Martin- St Kilda - VIC

LE COQ SPORTIF BOOTS GIVE-A-WAY

ABSW in association with French soccer brand Le Coq Sportif are giving you the chance to win soccer boots that will revolutionize the sport as we know it today.

Having started the company back in 1920, Le Coq Sportif has been a major brand in Europe and has kitted the likes of France, Senegal and Greece to name a few along side a string of other European clubs.

Currently kick-starting its promotions in Australia, the brand famous for its Rooster label has given *ABSW* two 'Triatom' soccer boots.

With its orientable and adjustable studs, the TRIATOM TRI MOTION soccer shoe is probably the best soccer shoe in the world and the first shoe, which adapts to the soccer players field position and the pitch.

Details on this competition will given in the next week, so keep an eye out for it – its certainly not one to miss.

le coq sportif

VIDUKA - RIGHT OR WRONG

Dear Sir,

It is quite amazing how a simple issue in the sport of soccer can be twisted and turned around in the space of a week.

I'm talking of course about the Viduka affair in light of his no-show for Australia's match against Venezuela.

The 'V' Bomber still wants to be part of the Green and Gold.

When news first came about the possibility of suspension for the player, the media were pretty much supporting him and blasting the ASA for their lack of compassion in the matter, considering the difficult period he is going through personally and professionally, at club level.

But after the 1-1 draw, in which his absence really was not an issue as the players that did turn up played out of their skins, the ASA were praised in the media for their strong leadership in making an example of someone as a message to other players to value the green and gold jersey.

The way I interpret this situation, it is a case of the ASA doing their job to protect the national team. And I don't think Viduka's threat to retire from the Socceroos was serious.

I long for the day when the media can simply present the facts about what occurs in the game and allow the fans to make up their minds about who is in the right or wrong. This, of course, will never happen.

Chris Low.
Bankstown, NSW.

GUNNER HEAVEN

Dear Sir,

Stamford Bridge did not only play host to a battle between two London powerhouses in English soccer last week, it was also the place where the clash of footballing cultures was made most apparent.

Arsenal have a squad of tightly knit players who have been with each other for many years and who know each others inside-outs by now. Their play last week was fluid, with great link up play that can only be born from years of playing together to a familiar routine, pattern.

Chelsea, on the other hand, play with staccato as their manager constantly chops and changes the formation and starting line-up. How do Chelsea expect to have the kind of consistency that Arsenal have when they don't have a consistent formation or line-up. The many players that Abramovich has brought in has been detrimental, in my view, to their chances of big success, and I feel that Ranieri will be dismissed at season's end due to Abramovich's inexperience and gung-ho attitude.

The Blues should take a leaf out of Arsenal,s books. Bring in a coach who keeps discipline and shape, and arrange the players around that lead. Bring in players with character and a connection with the club, and release those that do not. It's quite simple.

Marcus Shepparton.
North Shore, NSW.

COLOSIMO STATES HIS ROO CLAIM

Dear Sir,

The inferiority complex in home based players has finally disappeared after the sterling performance of Simon Colosimo in midfield in last week's friendly with Venezuela.

Colosimo walked straight into the starting line-up and dominated in a way that Paul Okon would be proud of. Considering NSL players have largely been ignored in the Socceroo set up for the past few years, the appearance of Colosimo, Elrich and Carle has been a breath of fresh air and proves the worth of NSL experience to young players.

Full-Time Socceroo cap calling for Simon Colosimo after his five star performance against Venezuela.

Other players such as Tom Pondeljak, Clint Bolton and Ante Milicic should be considered for the South Africa match, on top of the ones that travelled to South America.

This will prove to young players that they do not necessarily have to leave these shores to make a name for themselves.

Let's hope Farina continues this trend and encourages young talent to stay home.

Dennis Castle.
Melbourne, VIC.

GLORY WELL DONE

Dear Sir,

I would like to congratulate the Perth Glory fans for travelling and supporting their team. It is so good to see 'away' (interstate) supporters at soccer grounds. They are often the ones providing the noise and the atmosphere as home crowds, particularly Sydney crowds, tend to go quiet when there is not much action taking place.

It is a rare thing, these days. I remember the Brisbane Strikers supporters from a few years back, who came down to Sydney and sang their lungs out at every opportunity.

I hope that the new premier league can generate this kind of interest in the future, and keep it. I can think of nothing worse than an away team scoring a goal and hearing absolute silence from the terraces. Keep it up, Glory fans.

Kris Lees.
Meadowbank, NSW.

DAVIS' COMMENTS

Dear Sir,

I always read your paper with interest but sometimes also with bewilderment.

This week the article from your Victorian correspondent, Brendon Davis, was one that surprised me a little, but then again strange things often spin out of Victoria.

Mr. Davis in his editorial branded the recent Venezuela international against Australia as a meaningless Mickey Mouse game and the ASA's strong position in invoking regulations put in place by FIFA to support countries playing international fixtures as farcical.

In doing so Davis seemed to be aping the actions of a curious section of the media, particularly the once every four years soccer expert, that ought to know better.

Has the wheel of opinion turned that much? Or is this part of the yo-yo brigade which only a short while ago decried the small number of international matches Australia played, and the lack of preparation for world cup campaigns?

Oh, and apparently they want all internationals to be played in Europe, so as not to upset the big European clubs because they pay the wages. Are these the same people who criticized past ASF administrators for supporting Terry Venables in his belief that the best way for Australia to go forward was to base the Socceroo campaign in England, because that was where not only our best players were, but also and there was more chance of staging so called meaningful internationals. Are you confused?

Well, I have little doubt that in the past things were confusing.

Thank goodness the ASA is putting things in order. At last we seem to have a decisive administration who are ready to place these dictatorial Clubs on notice.

I don't always blame the players and like Davis agree that at times they appear to be the meat in the sandwich, but cynical manipulation by powerful clubs, which hold back preparation for Australia's biggest challenge of all actually qualifying for a World Cup berth must be finally stopped.

Perhaps things might be different if Oceania had been granted what every other confederation is guaranteed, a World Cup spot.

The most meaningful matches would then overwhelmingly be the Oceania qualifiers. Instead the Oceania winner must prove themselves in a cup final type play-off against the fifth placed South American team which guarantees the countries of the SA confederation an almost a one in two chance of a World Cup spot.

No wonder the South Americans can point to so many appearances in World Cups. Indeed it is a wonder that any actually miss out!

It is in this light that perhaps the Venezuela match, played at a time specifically set aside for international duty, in a crowded football calendar, might be just the most important match of the Socceroos campaign.

Arthur Huggins
Ngunnawal, ACT

JUST TRY AND BAN VIDUKA

Dear Sir,

Rumour has it that the Australian Soccer Association (ASA) will invoke a FIFA ruling and suspend Mark Viduka from his next club match. What a joke.

Has Soccer Australia completely lost the plot? Or more importantly has Frank Farina lost it also...?

If it was good enough for Leeds to show compassion towards Mark (by allowing him to return to his father's side for three weeks), then it should be good enough for Australian soccer.

Apparently Viduka would consider retiring from International Football if this ban on his club match is to take place.

Personally I wouldn't blame him... It seems to me that Farina is the key to avoiding this embarrassing controversy by simply putting Soccer Australia straight and supporting Viduka's loyal(to his employer) decision. So why hasn't he?

Farina is the reason that Ned Zelic retired from International Football. There is a good chance Viduka may be Farina's next victim... We shall see

From the email

Ante Boras

Victorian Chronicles

LAST KNIGHT

Walking into Sommers Street, past the Croatian music, into the Batcave for a drink or meat roll, queuing for the old and cold toilets, the mud soaked carpark, more meat rolls and the excitement of the older Croatians in the Club after a Knights win, coach meets president carpark after a series of losses .....

Wonderful stuff but it'll be reduced to a memory after the Knights play their last NSL fixture at Sommers Street on Sunday night.

A large crowd, which will include many South supporters will celebrate the occasion with mixed emotions, the Knights have been a great NSL Club, they have been central to the very existence of so many of Victorias post war migrants greatly enhancing Victorias cultural composition.

And they have produced some outstanding international level footballers, probably more than any other NSL Club.

I've enjoyed many great nights at Sommers Street, which of the derby games was the best will be debated for decades to come.

Most of the Knights players will get to participate in this seasons VPL as they are all being released by the Knights.

A debt of $1,600,000 makes the clubs future uncertain.

Thank you to the administrators, volunteers, players, staff and sponsors of the Melbourne Knights Soccer Club from the Victorian Soccer and wider communities. You've made a substantial contribution to sport and culture in our great state, hopefully you'll become a force in the revamped state league very soon. And hopefully football will be played at Sommers Street for many years to come.

AND AT SOUTH

Just what is going on?

Rumours persist over who will buy the Club, with the President Peter Mitrakas questioning various aspects of the proposed reformed league in his luncheon address prior to the Spirit game.

With interests associated with communications entrepreneur John Ilhan being the most likely, Adelaide businessman Con Makris told the Victorian media during the week he is serious about an involvement with South. Makris has his doubters who question his motives and prior association with soccer clubs.

Meanwhile, a prominent management consultant is busily working with the board enhancing a longer term business plan as a component of the Lakeside clubs bid for entry into the new national league.

For at least the next few weeks however attention will be deflected to the park where South are looking to add a fifth championship to their trophy cabinet.

With Simon Storey, Steve Laurie and maybe Mehmet Durakovic all returning to the defence, Souths fortunes may just turn around this week.

WHILE FROM ENGLAND

If my source is accurate, Socceroo Stan Lazaridis will return to the Birmingham line up for Wednesdays cruch fixture with Boro.

Lazardis was expected to be out for 4 weeks after suffering a hamstring injury while on national duty.

But the medical team at Birmingham say its healed quicker than expected but have asked ABSW readers not leak this news to Suart McLaren.

AUCTION SUCCESS

South held their annual auction on Friday night with the offered items including a new car and a jet ski.

Both sold at high prices, whicle a plethora of goodies ranging from food to clothing and South memorabilia all sold at high prices.

One item attracting lots of interest and spirited bidding was the boot Kristian Sarkies scored his first goal with. This was mounted and auctioned, it may be a very valuable item some day, as will the player himself.

And didn't the dance floor light up after the auction. Striker Scott Tunbridge was the first player up, showing young Josh and Mark the moves that pull the chicks.

FIFA TO STUFF IT UP AGAIN

EDITORIAL By Brendon Davis
World Club Championships a STUPID Idea

Spain's 2003 World Club Championships were cancelled due to lack of interest, lack of sponsorship and an absence of any television coverage – actually no one apart from the Wollongong Wolves and Sepp Blatter wanted it.

Not surprising after the 2002 Brazilian fiasco, can anyone even remember who played in the final (Cornithians beat Vasco Da Gama on penalties).

The football calendar is already ridiculously congested, on top of the 45 league, cup and various trophy matches a middle level club will participate in, there are umpteen internationals and enough other tournaments without a need to create more absolute meaningless competitions.

At the risk of sounding unpatriotic, its only the Australians and a few soccer minnows that will ever support the creation of these so called "championships".

Why?

Because it's the only way some clubs believe they can over come their financial losses – every discussion on the WCC in Australia focuses on the participation millions rather than the tournament.

Australian soccer craves a simple solution as an easy way to add excitement to a floundering National League. NSL General Manager Stephan Kamaz typifies the silly local thinking with his

response announcing "This is terrific news. I can not think of a better incentive for our clubs than to qualify for this rich event".

Actually, it could be terrible news for our competition.

Rather than focusing clubs attention on building sustainable football and business models, developing players through academies for the medium term survival of their clubs, you'll certainly see clubs gamble everything on WCC qualification. These clubs will see the WCC prizemoney as a lottery – as the great salvation in their survival plans just as Leeds did with Champions League participation.

They will fail to invest in either their own future of the development of our countries future footballers by buying a few past their use-by date European footballers, at inflated prices seeking WCC riches.

And Mr Kamaz, if you are unable to "think of better incentives" then you need to bring in someone who can.

One issue that even the European Club Forum agreed on was vehement opposition to the WCC. The 102 member clubs, who can't agree on much at all were almost unanimous in rejecting this last silly Blatter idea.

Just why Blatter is so determined to push through something which all sensible football bodies agree is meaningless is beyond logic although some scribes suggests Blatter wants to leave a legacy before retiring.

For mind he has done so already with his mistreatment of Oceanic as a political pawn in his re-election.

Despite the glowing appeal of the riches to cash strapped local clubs lets hope common sense prevails in London on 29 February when FIFA's executive meets on the subject.

But expecting common sense from the FIFA executive – a nice thought.

NATIONAL YOUTH LEAGUE 2003-2004 NORTHERN DIVISION ROUND 26

FINAL LEAGUE LADDER

	P	W	D	B	L	F	A	Pts
Canberra Deakin	**22**	**16**	**4**	**4**	**2**	**72**	**31**	**52**
Parramatta Power	22	15	2	4	5	60	31	47
AIS	21	13	4	4	4	53	21	43
Newcastle United	22	12	3	4	7	48	29	39
Marconi Stallions	22	11	3	4	8	40	30	36
Northern Spirit	22	9	6	4	7	38	33	33
Wollongong Wolves	20	9	3	4	8	37	29	30
Brisbane Strikers	21	9	0	4	12	34	51	27
Sydney Olympic	22	7	4	4	11	40	53	25
Sydney United	22	6	2	4	14	34	59	20
QAS	22	4	3	4	15	39	66	15
ACTAS	22	1	2	4	19	16	78	5

SATURDAY 28 FEBRUARY 2004

Northern Spirit .....5 QAS 1
(Lima 50', Obeid 65', Tsironis 71', 80', Guglielmino 88')
(Butters 7')

Sydney Olympic .....1 ACTAS 0
(Baillie 62')

Canberra Deakin .....8 Sydney United 4
(Caldwell 7', 24', 31', 75', Cattanach 43', 59', Barisic 78', 90')
(Glavas 1', 13', Tresoglavic 34', 68')

BYE – Marconi Stallions
BYE – Parramatta Power

NATIONAL YOUTH LEAGUE 2003-2004
NORTHERN DIVISION CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES

Elimination Semi-Final
6 March 2004
(3) AIS v Newcastle United (4)
Time: 7.00 pm
Venue: AIS Soccer Field

Preliminary Semi-Final
6 March 2004
(1) Canberra Deakin v Parramatta Power (2)
Time: 5.00 pm
Venue: McKellar Soccer Centre

NYL Final Top Scorers

Caldwell Nathan	Canberra Deakin	19
Cattanach Robbie	Canberra Deakin	19
Bridge Mark	Parramatta Power	14
Smits Timothy	Q.A.S	13
Cowburn Jason	Newcastle United	11
Younis Robert	Parramatta Power	11
Maller Andrew	Northern Spirit	10
Oricchio Claudio	Marconi Stallions	10
De Silva Tim	Q.A.S	9
Musumeci Marino	Parramatta Power	9
Peltohaka Dean	Brisbane Strikers	9
Celeski Billy	A.I.S	8
Deegan Mathew	A.I.S	8
Pideski Carl	Canberra Deakin	8
Simic Jozo	Sydney United	8

The winner of the Northern Division will take on Southern Division champions South Melbourne to see who will be the best YOUTH team in Australia.

ABSW wishes to extend its congratulations towards the Canberra Deakin youth squad who again have proved to be a formidable force in this year's Northern National Youth League.

Green and Gold Army Series

Green & Gold Army
http://www.ggarmy.com

SOCCERNOOS

The Green and Gold Army are pleased to announce that we have secured an exclusive block of seats for the upcoming international at West London's Loftus Road.
Considering the large ex pat communities and tremendous sporting rivalry between the two nations it should be a massive night in London.

@ LOFTUS RD, WEST LONDON
TUESDAY MARCH 30 KO 8PM
QPR Ticketline 44 (0) 870 112 1967
Hours: Mon-Fri 9.30-4.45/Sat 9.30-NOON

In an effort to make the maximum amount of noise and support the boys 100% **make sure you purchase your tickets in the Green and Gold Army section** of the ground (Behind the goals - 12 pound each). To do this **you must call the QPR Ticketline on 44 (0) 870 112 1967 and request seating in 'the Green and Gold Army' section.**
This offer is only available via the phone and not availalbe on-line so make sure you obtain seats in our section.The section is open to all so round up your crew and get to the game (though if you are bringing a non-ggarmy.com registered friends please have them register **free** before the match).
Tickets are bound to go fast, if you aren't in London but have family or friends who might be interested in coming along, by all mean pass this e-mail on.
We will be working on the night with 'TheGroupies' (a young, mainly Aussie social group of sports followers, festival lovers and party animals living in and around London.
Have a look at what they are up to at www.thegroupies.com) to help build a massive coordinated supporter group.
Our aim is to get everyone in the same t-shirts (prices TBC but should be 6-8 quid), offer discounted pub promotions and have everyone singing from the same song sheets to create a fantastic atmosphere. More news on this (and Australian based events) in our bumper Soccernoos due out mid-March

NB The game is 5am Wed March 31 AEDST

IF YOU HAVE FRIENDS OR FAMILY IN THE UK OR EUROPE LOOKING TO HEAD TO THE GAME-MAKE SURE YOU LET THEM KNOW ALL ABOUT THIS MATCH AND GET THEM ALONG TO JOIN THE GREEN AND GOLD ARMY-SHOULD BE HUGE!!

What about in Australia?

Fancy getting up early and watch the Roos? We will have a number of functions around Australia announced soon so keep checking ggarmy.com

Matildas dodging the lightning

Good luck to the Matildas who completed their Australia Cup which was interrupted by the weather on two occasions but no doubt will need to deal with similar steamy conditions for their upcoming Olympic Qualifiers in the Pacific. Good luck girls!!

The Green and Gold Army- Australia's national soccer teams supporters group
Register free today at ggarmy.com

Leeds takes the Mickey out of Australian soccer

By Mark van Aken

We all suspected, hell, some of us down right testified to it. It was the basis of an excellent SBS special investigation many years back and in the last week it has been confirmed.

Leeds United has absolutely no regard for Australian soccer or her national team.

Leeds United Chief Executive Trevor Birch was quoted in the Yorkshire Evening Post last week as saying "What's happened is an absolute disgrace" in relation to the Mark Viduka suspension imposed by the ASA. For this we can't condemn him, heck every second Aussie soccer fan would probably agree. The thing is, Birch couldn't just leave it at that, oh no, he went on to say "The survival of Leeds United is in jeopardy and we have this, all for the sake of a Mickey Mouse game that took place at the other side of the world."

Thanks for that Mr Birch, finally after all the years of innuendo and assuming as much we now know where we stand in the eyes of Leeds- and that is apparently a soccer third-world colonial joke.

Given that we don't belong to a confederation with an on going and meaningful confederation cup (such as Euro, Cope America etc) 'friendly' matches are always of greater importance to Australia than most.

This was never truer than in this match, which was against a team presently occupying the 5th spot in CONMEBOL. The precise opponent that, save for New Zealand, stands between the Socceroos and a European summer holiday in Germany in two years.

Birch also said "There is no one more loyal towards the (Australian) cause than Mark, yet they do this to him." Once again here we aren't going to disagree. On balance the ASA's stance may down the stretch prove to be a masterstroke. In fairness, they have now set a precedent that for the first time in years allows clubs, players, fans and media all know where they stand once and for all. The ASA is dead serious about so called friendlies and it is simply deeply unfortunate that Viduka and Chipperfield have been the ones that fell victim of this new hard line.

Frank Lowy, John O'Neill, Frank Farina and everyone in between above or below in the food chain at the ASA are no doubt acutely aware of Leeds precarious grip on life the English Premier League. Australian soccer fans are too, and it's for this reason that we all felt that the ban was harsh, particularly on a weekend when they faced old foes Manchester United. But Birch's comments did nothing to help foster this sympathy. His lack of tact in a delicate situation was poor to say the least.

He did however do his best to ensure this situation doesn't happen again. Not by heeding the ASA's loud and clear message and ensuring his players front up for national duty but rather by inflaming the argument by pushing Viduka towards Socceroos retirement. "I would fully understand it if he told them where to stick international football now. They don't deserve someone like him," said Birch.

Ooh, nice try. Wouldn't Birch just love that, Viduka spitting the dummy and quitting the Socceroos? Fortunately the striker from Melbourne's North-West isn't so gullible, fortunately he has been the one in the middle who has dodged the cross fire and come out as he went in- a consummate professional and a patriotic and committed Australian national team member.

"I care passionately about playing for my country and thoughts of retiring from the national team were never an option," proclaimed Viduka in a statement issued in Leeds.

Given Leeds track record with Australian players, we should not be surprised by this outburst. On the issue of Australia not deserving Mark Viduka, we could perhaps suggest the same of Leeds. A club that has plundered the ranks of Australian soccer over the last decade lifting young Australians from our system with barely a transfer fee paid. Viduka is the exception of course, having crossed from Celtic.

Leeds United Chief Executive Trevor Birch had some interesting words to say about the ASA with the situation regarding Aussie Mark Viduka

An aforementioned SBS documentary several years back exposed the clubs policy of favouring young Australians of British heritage. This way they could later be pressured into playing for one of the British states rather than Australia and thus avoiding all the baggage of having them represent their own geographically challenged country that has a habit of playing "Mickey Mouse" matches. Leeds own Jamie Mc Master is one who Australia has lost due to this exact policy.

In what was almost incidental compared to the furore of all the pre and post match frenzy, the Socceroos went to Caracas and drew (and should have won). With close to half the team out they showed that our depth runs deep and the game was a good one for Australian soccer and Frank Farina's 'Mickey Mouse' Club.

Note to the ASA: there is a sponsorship opportunity with Disney just waiting to happen here-get on the phone, and by the way, my brokerage fee is 15%. I won't hold my breath.

FARINA BUZZING IN CONFIDENCE

Ready for his next assignment: Farina will be busily preparing for their friendly hit-out against South Africa next month.

By Peter Damalas

A Socceroos team lacking a host of first team regulars came away from South America with an inspiring 1-1 draw, a result which will certainly boost coach Frank Farina's confidence in the lead up to the World Cup qualifiers.

The week leading up to the friendly match with Venezuela was dominated by issues surrounding player availability- the never ceasing club versus country row- and the repercussions of players' absences.

After the match however, most thoughts turned towards the way the beleaguered group of players responded to playing an away fixture, the players holding firm for almost the entire match, with Farina claiming a tactical victory.

Despite the disappointment of conceding a late goal to the home side after it looked like Australia were cruising towards victory in the second half, Farina was pleased with the overall performance from the under strength team.

"I would have signed for that result before the game, but when you lead for so long and to be fair we should have made it 2-0 through David Zdrilic, we were a little disappointed in the end," he said.

"Again it was a good result and I was very, very happy and proud of the way the boys played."

Striker Paul Agostino was the one to profit from the absence of Mark Viduka, Harry Kewell and John Aloisi, when he gave Australia the lead with a simple tap-in on seventeen minutes. The German based striker was not selected in the original twenty man squad but answered the eleventh hour call to star alongside Aberdeen's David Zdrilic up front.

The players, it seemed, had precise instructions from the coach to close down the Venezuelan players as soon as they lost possession, and danger man Juan Arango was restricted to long range efforts for much of the game.

On the ball, the Australians were composed throughout, Parramatta Power's Simon Colosimo deserving credit for the way he handled the conditions, while Marco Bresciano proved to be a vital link between midfield and attack.

Farina likened the Parma player, who has scored some crucial goals for his club in Serie A this season, to the most recognised player in the world.

"I believe [Bresciano] will go on to be one of the greats. In terms of dead-ball situations I suppose he is Australia's David Beckham. He's quite a wonderful strike on him whether it be from corners or set pieces.

"Hopefully I am not putting the mocker on him, he's going to be somebody that is going to go a long way," he said.

In the second period, Australia camped themselves in their own half, and despite conceding territory and possession, were hardly stretched by an impotent Venezuelan attack.

But after defender Jose Manuel Rey was sent off for two bookable offences, Zdrilic missed a good chance to double the lead when his downward header bounced wide of the goal following a corner.

"If that chance had gone in, in the second half to make it 2-0, then it was game over," Farina admitted.

The away side were made to pay for this missed opportunity two minutes into stoppage time. Midfield creator Juan Arango was left unmarked on the far post, and after a cross from the right found him in space, the 23 year old buried the ball into the back of the net with a first time volley.

Despite the heartbreak of the last gasp equaliser, Farina was positive in his evaluation of the performance and the result.

"Out of times like this, you can get a lot of positives".

"You mentioned Simon Colosimo, I thought he was outstanding; the likes of David Zdrilic, who got through a mountain of work, and when you come into places like this, those sorts of players you do need," Farina told the Australian Soccer Association website.

"There were a lot of real positives that came out of this game. The learning curve in terms of how we approached it, what we tried, it sort of worked for us, came off.

Apart from the players that got an opportunity, the report that we will be doing up on the game we'll may be using further on down the track, if and when November [2005] comes around," he said.

Farina also described the mood of the dressing room at the conclusion.

"I'll tell a funny story, Kevin Muscat has walked into the dressing room first and he's volleyed a bottle full of water half way across the room, because he was a bit upset about conceding a goal so late.

"I think that shows the sentiment of the team and they came in quite disappointed after leading for such a long period of the game. We just reminded them that it was a fantastic result and they played very well," he said.

The only casualty from the fixture was flying -left midfielder, Stan Lazaridis, who was substituted in the first half with a hamstring tear that will keep him out of club action for up to two weeks.

"I feel very sorry for Stan. He's obviously got a bit of a problem with his hamstring," Farina said.

"I said to Stan if there is any way we can help out with the club, we're glad to do it."

The ASA have come under fire from a number of European clubs including Birmingham City and Leeds United about the Venezuela match.

The next assignment for the Socceroos will take place in a far more convenient location. Australia will take on South Africa at Loftus Road in London on March 30.

The upcoming international friendly match will be broadcast LIVE and EXCLUSIVE on SBS Televisio on Wednesday 31st March, at 5am AEST.

AUSSIE BOYS BACK FROM CARACAS

By Joesph Carlucci

Australian-based Socceroo team members, Simon Colosimo, Ahmad Elrich and Nick Carle returned home on Saturday morning, 21st February, following the Socceroos stellar performance against Venezuela.

A 1-1 result in South America, in front of an intense crowd, pays tribute to the Australian group. The Socceroos put a fabulous performance together, a huge boost in morale considering a number of key players were absent.

Ramifications of the club versus country debacle left aside, the Venezuela clash featured three locally based players, rewarding the talent in the NSL.

Smiles covered the faces of each Socceroo on return from Venezuela, as the local boys played a huge role in Australia's fine performance in Caracas.

Simon Colosimo of Parramatta Power has enjoyed a tremendous season after moving to Sydney. The former Perth Glory and Carlton star joined Parramatta in-order to move to Sydney, placing himself closer to the eye of Socceroo coach, Frank Farina.

The move has worked wonders, as Colosimo found himself in Farina's first eleven in Caracas.

Our NSL Roos: Simon Colosimo – Nick Carle and Ahmad Elrich.

" I really enjoyed it, it is great to be back with the National team and the boys again."

The Power's central midfielder made a real impact, receiving accolades from coach Farina who saw Colosimo as one of the best players on the park.

"I enjoyed the whole experience. In Venezuela, the public was amazing. Even though it was a friendly match, the atmosphere was really good. It was a great feeling to play in-front of such a crowd, albeit tough though away from home," were Colosimo's comments on return from Caracas.

Parramatta Power teammate, Ahmad Elrich too got a chance to shine for the National team. An injury to Birmingham City's Stan Lazaridis after twenty-eight minutes resulted in the England based Socceroo to limp off the field with a hamstring tear, awarding Elrich a first cap for the Socceroos.

"It has been a dream come true (the past few months) with the Olyroos and getting a call up to the Socceroos. The Socceroos has been a boyhood dream of mine, a massive achievement personally, considering also that I got a really good run in the match."

Elrich's ambition is to consolidate a spot in Farina's squad, though attentions now return to his clubside Parramatta.

"It is hard to leave your team to go off on International duty. I had complete faith in the boys, and was very confident that we would pick up the points up for grabs. Now we have cemented second spot, and I'm really happy about that."

Further smiles for Marconi talent Nick Carle, who has really come of age this season. A brief stint in France followed by a return to the NSL and Marconi has seen Carle emerge as a true leader on the park. Fine passing and immaculate control have rewarded Carle with Olyroo selection, where he did not fail to impress, along with the latest Socceroo call-up.

" It was an excellent experience. Each of the lads helped me out, as it was my first call-up. They were fantastic role models to look up to."

Carle did enter the fray eight minutes from full-time, replacing David Zdrillic, and spoke only praise for his teammates.

" The match was a credit to the whole-team. Each of the lads played very well, from the front of the park to the defence. We did limit them (Venezuela) to long-range shots, which with a goalkeeper like Mark Schwarzer behind you, does not put you in great risk of conceding goals. Credit to the defence. Their goal at the end was disappointing as it was their only clear cut chance in front of goal."

Paul Agostino's go ahead goal after eighteen minutes and the overall performance of the squad present coach Frank Farina with only positives from this trip. Though, disappointment of conceding a late goal, Juan Arango in the second minute of injury time, was visible.

"The lads were disappointed conceding the late goal. Though on the whole, considering that we had been together for no more than two days, with some of the boys arriving late, and of course the climate there, we did exceptionally well, and now can look ahead taking many positives from this match," added Ahmad Elrich.

Simon Colosimo too could only take positives from the match.

"It was a blow conceding a goal at the end, though if it were a World Cup Qualifier and we managed to come away with a 1-1 draw in South America and a home leg to play, the result was a great one."

SUNDAY NIGHT SOCCER airs weekly at 10:00 pm on 98.5 FM.

VICTORIAN PREMIER LEAGUE 2004

More VPL action from last weekend's matches (Photo By Steven Gray)

Round 4

Friday 27 February 2004
Oakleigh Cannons Preston Lions1 1
(George Tzouramanis) (Dimce Panev)
Saturday 28 February 2004
Frankston Pines 1 Essendon Royals 0
(Miles Tidd)
Altona Magic 3 St Albans Saints 2
(own goal, Slave Bozinovski, (Leon Buhic, own goal) Agim Sherifovski)
Sunday 29 February 2004
Bentleigh Greens 0 Bulleen Zebras 1
(Damien Guglielmi)
Fawkner Blues 1 Green Gully Cavaliers 2
(Ljubo Lapsansky) (Peter Hader, Zoran Markovski)

Senior Ladder

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
BulleenZebras	**4**	**4**	**0**	**0**	**9**	**2**	**12**
PrestonLions	4	2	2	0	5	3	8
GreenGullyCavaliers	4	2	2	0	5	3	8
StAlbansSaints	4	2	1	1	7	3	7
AltonaMagic	4	2	1	1	7	5	7
FrankstonPines	4	2	1	1	4	2	7
OakleighCannons	4	2	1	1	5	5	7
EssendonRoyals	4	1	1	2	2	2	4
WhittleseaStallions	3	0	1	2	4	6	1
KnoxCity	3	0	1	2	1	6	1
BentleighGreens	4	0	1	3	1	7	1
FawknerBlues	4	0	0	4	2	8	0

Leading Goalscorers

Peter Kakos Bulleen Zebras 3
Leon Buhic St Albans Saints 3
Steven Camilleri Altona Magic 2
Damien Guglielmi Bulleen Zebras 2
Miles Tidd Frankston Pines 2
Peter Hader Green Gully Cavaliers 2
Juan Nilo Oakleigh Cannons 2

Round Five Fixtures

Sat, 13Mar Altona Magic v Frankston Pines
Sun,14Mar Knox City v Fawkner Blues
Sun,14Mar St Albans Saints v Whittlesea Stallions
Sun,14Mar,Preston Lions v Bentleigh Greens
Sun,14Mar,Green Gully v Oakleigh Cannons
Mon,15 Mar,Bulleen Zebras v Essendon Royals

Big guns firing as Zebras and Cavaliers win

By Roy Hay

The big guns in the La Ionica Victorian Premier League are beginning to fire as Bulleen Zebras and Green Gully Cavaliers recorded close fought victories in Round Four on Sunday.

The Zebras only just managed to hold out a determined young Bentleigh Greens side thanks to a goal very late in the first half from Damien Guglielmi in the forty-fifth minute. Neither side could make any impression in the second half.

Green Gully Cavaliers led Fawkner Blues after eleven minutes through a Peter Hader penalty, but former Melbourne Knights star Ljubo Lapsansky equalised seven minutes later. Another former Knight, Zoran Markovski restored theCavaliers' lead in 32 minutes and there was no change in the next hour of play.

These results see the Zebras on top of the ladder with a one hundred percent record, while the Cavaliers join Preston Lions on eight points as thirdand second respectively.

Altona Magic had a thrilling three-two win over St Albans Saints on Saturday night while a single goal was enough to see Frankston Pines home against Essendon Royals.

In what was, as expected, a high quality, high speed and physical game, the Magic took a two-goal lead in the first half. The first was an own goal after only four minutes and Slave Bozinovski made it two on the stroke ofhalf-time.

Then the Saints began their counter-attack which brought them level at two-all. The prolific Leon Buhic got his third goal of the season in 70 minutes and then the Magic conceded an own goal. Both teams had a player sent off as the pressure mounted, but the Magic triumphed with a goal in the last minute of normal time from Agim Sherifovski.

Miles Tidd was the hero for Frankston Pines with the only goal of the game against Essendon Royals after 42 minutes. In a see-sawing match both sides had chances to alter the scoreline, but it remained unchanged till the end.

Oakleigh Cannons grabbed a very late goal to force a one-all draw with Preston Lions in the opening game in Round Four on Friday night.

Dimce Panev scored for Preston after 17 minutes and the longer the game continued the more this looked like it might be the decisive goal. However with only only four minutes of normal time remaining George Tzouramanis put away the equaliser to rescue a point for the Cannons.

There will be no matches in the La Ionica Victorian Premier League this weekend because of the Labour Day holiday. Matches in Round 5 will resume on Saturday 13 March.

ASA Hits Back On Roo Bashing

The Australian Soccer Association (ASA) last week felt compelled to refute recent allegations that Socceroos coach Frank Farina was told who to select for the match against Venezuela. It also said media reports about a "player revolt" were wildly inaccurate.

The Acting Chief Executive of ASA, Mr Richard Johnson, said national team coach Frank Farina had never been advised by ASA which players to choose for international Socceroo duty.

"ASA policy is that the national coach selects the strongest possible Socceroo squad to play at all times," he said.

"ASA then handles all administrative issues between players and clubs."

The suggestion that Frank Farina is not in charge of team selection is absolutely incorrect and typical of the misinformation that has been reported in recent days.

"Frank Farina is not only completely and solely in charge of team selection for the Socceroos, but he is totally at ease with ASA's policy on the availability of players selected for international duty," Mr Johnson said.

"Furthermore, he is very positive about the international program following recent events and the decisions made by ASA."

Mr Johnson said ASA had inherited a legacy of ad hoc policy on Socceroos selection and was putting in place a process which would be clearly understood by players, clubs and the media.

"This takes some time, but we are already well advanced with plans to establish a European base and appoint an executive to liaise with players and clubs as well as introduce a process for determining the status of injured players."

ASA would like to set the record straight about the Socceroos' reaction to its policy on Socceroos' selection. While players recognise the competing interests of players, clubs and administrators, and sympathise with the personal situation of Mark Viduka and Scott Chipperfield, the overwhelming feeling from the Socceroo players in Caracas is that there is a FIFA Regulation in place and ASA is adhering to that regulation.

"They felt it would contribute to a better quality international program and ultimately, to the Socceroos chances of qualifying for the FIFA World Cup," Mr Johnson said.

This feeling was made clear to staff and ASA management during the trip to Venezuela and reinforces the commitment of ASA to stick by its policy on selection for the national team.

The Socceroos captain for the match against Venezuela, Craig Moore, said today: "Every player that I spoke to in Caracas is right behind what ASA are trying to do with the international program for the Socceroos and making sure that everyone selected has the chance to be released by their club.

"These games are very important to us and the players want to play every game when Frank (Farina) chooses us.

"Look, we were very sympathetic to the two lads who did not make it to Caracas, but the players all want to make themselves available for the Socceroo matches and this policy will help any player with their club should they have any extra pressure not to attend international matches. The boys are behind it and think it's very good."

Socceroos goalkeeper, Mark Schwarzer, said: "I don't believe that this player availability policy should ever be an issue, because as I see it, the ASA policy will always be a minor issue. By minor I mean it hardly will be utilised because most of the players that I have spoken to in Caracas are glad to play for the Socceroos and do make themselves always available.

"If ASA decide to ban players who are unavailable then so be it and whilst I am very sympathetic for Dukes (Mark Viduka) and Chippers (Scott Chipperfield), I can't get involved in that and can only concentrate on my situation. But for me and many of the other players that I spoken with, it won't be an issue because we love playing for the Socceroos and will be available if selected by Frankie."

Socceroos coach, Frank Farina, said: "I'm very comfortable with the policy that has been set in place by ASA. Unfortunately things don't always go according to plan but I believe it's positive for the long-term success of our international Socceroos program."

ASA stands by its decision to apply its policy on international representation to Mark Viduka and Scott Chipperfield. The personal situation of both players was considered at length but the fact that both had made themselves available for local club games prior to the Socceroos match gave ASA no choice but to invoke Article 40 of FIFA Regulations.

The background to Mark Viduka's situation has been well-publicised. In Scott Chipperfield's case, he had made it clear to team management that he would be available, notwithstanding the recent birth of his son, and had already embarked for Caracas. While delayed in Madrid, team management had suggested two alternative travel plans and explained that Article 40 could be invoked if he did not continue his journey.

If action was not taken against these players it would have run counter to the spirit and letter of both ASA and FIFA policy and be unfair to those players who did travel to Caracas. Many of these players were under extreme pressure from their clubs not to make the trip and to withdraw from the squad. It would also have been unfair to those clubs which, under very difficult circumstances, released players to represent Australia against Venezuela.

ASA To Set Up Euro Base?

Word around town has it that the Australian SA hope to establish a European office as soon as possible to avoid the problems involving Mark Viduka and Scott Chipperfield that reared ugly scenes between players and club officials after the Venezuela friendly match in Caracas.

The ASA said it would appoint an executive to represent its interests, improve liaison with players and clubs, and provide a European base now so many of Australia's "home" friendlies are played in the region.

Australia's next international is at Loftus Road in London against South Africa next month. There are also ongoing talks with the Turkish FA about a two-match series in Australia in May.

This would surely attract a number of supporters due to Australia having a large Turkish community, especially in Melbourne and Sydney.

Many of the Aussie stars abroad have stated that a Euro base is the only way to go considering the amount of hours it takes to fly for a friendly hit-out in Australia.

Newcastle chiefs in Europe chasing big-names

Newcastle United are already busily planning for next season's new National Premier League competition.

Though no official announcements have been made about the make-up of the new league, Newcastle aren't sitting on their hands.

Club chiefs Con Constantine and Remo Nogarotto are currently in Europe for talks with several high-profile transfer targets.

Newcastle are believed to be pursuing Bosman deals and are free to speak with players coming out of contract at the end of the season.

A source close to the camp has told tribalfootball.com that KV Oostende midfielder and ex-Australia skipper Paul Okon is high on Newcastle's shopping list.

Nogarotto has an excellent record of attracting top names to Australia, having previously brought Robbie Slater, Ian Crook Graham Arnold and Nicola Berti to Northern Spirit.

National Soccer League

After Round 26	TOTAL P	W	D	L	Bye	F	A	PTS	HOME P	W	D	L	F	A	AWAY P	W	D	L	F	A
PERTH GLORY	24	18	3	3	2	56	22	57	12	11	1	0	33	6	11	7	2	3	23	16
PARRAMATTA POWER	24	16	3	5	2	58	30	51	12	9	2	1	39	13	12	7	1	4	19	17
ADELAIDE UNITED	24	11	7	6	2	28	25	40	12	6	4	2	12	10	12	5	3	4	16	15
MARCONI STALLIONS	24	10	8	6	2	29	25	38	13	7	3	3	14	9	11	3	5	3	15	16
SOUTH MELBOURNE	24	11	4	9	2	39	20	37	11	8	0	3	28	11	13	3	4	6	11	9
BRISBANE STRIKERS	24	9	5	10	2	28	33	32	12	7	3	2	16	9	12	2	2	8	12	24
NORTHERN SPIRIT	24	9	3	12	2	31	33	30	12	6	2	4	20	13	12	3	1	8	11	20
SYDNEY OLYMPIC	24	7	8	9	2	26	29	29	12	4	4	4	13	12	12	3	4	5	13	19
WOLLONGONG WOLVES	24	8	5	11	2	34	41	29	12	3	4	5	18	17	12	4	2	6	16	24
SYDNEY UNITED	24	7	8	9	2	18	25	29	12	4	5	3	14	11	12	3	4	5	4	14
NEWCASTLE UTD	24	6	6	12	2	18	33	24	12	5	2	5	11	10	12	1	5	6	7	23
MELBOURNE KNIGHTS	24	6	5	13	2	21	41	23	12	2	4	6	11	20	12	4	1	7	10	21
KINGZ	24	4	3	17	2	25	51	15	12	3	1	8	16	25	12	1	2	9	8	27

PERTH GLORY **2**
(D Mori 83', N Mrdja 86')
MARCONI STALLIONS **2**
(J Spiteri 21', 76')

Referee: E Lennie. **Crowd:** 10,458. **Venue:** MembersEquity Stadium.
Teams: PERTH GLORY: Petkovic, Bingley, Hassell, Murphy, Despotovski (Caceres 57'), North, Bymes (Coyne 70'), Pondeljak, Mori, Faria (Mrdja 57'), Harnwell.
Subs Not Used: Matassa (gk).
MARCONI STALLIONS: Alogdellis, Bell (Webb 52'), Longo, Costanzo, Gibson, Spiteri, Brosque (Severino 57'), Thwaite, Brodie, Carle, Anabalon (Last 70').
Subs Not Used: Turnbull (gk).
Cautions: NIL

KINGZ **4**
(D Hay 42', H Ngata 45' pen, 81' pen, J Christie 76')
STRIKERS STRIKERS **3**
(M McKay 7', J Rose 54', S Fitzsimmons 57')

Referee: Derek Rugg. Crowd: 950.Venue: Ericsson Stadium.

Teams: KINGZ: Utting, Rayner (Jackson 46'), Tambouras, Burton (Collins 85'), Christie, Ngata, Rowley, Martin, Wylie, Williams (Campbell 46'), Hay.
Subs Not Used: Williams (gk).
BRISBANE STRIKERS: Baldock, McCloughan, McLaren, Fitzsimmons, Webber (Heath 67'), Hilton (Evans 77'), Pilic, McKay, Scuderi, Moon, Rose (Peltohawa 73').
Subs Not Used:
Cautions: M Hilton (BS) 70', C Baldock (BS) 80'.

PLAYER OF THE WEEK

Alex Tobin
(Northern Spirit)

You couldn't go past this week's player of the week after Alex Tobin recorded possibly his last ever performance on the field against Adelaide United in the NSL. His record of 522 games speaks for itself - he truly will go down in Australian sporting history as one of this code's all-time legend players.

ABSW salutes the sterling career of Alex Tobin - Thanks for the memories.

NORTHERN SPIRIT **2**
(A Kwasnik 27', 69')
ADELAIDE UNITED **1**
(A Vidmar 46')

Referee: Matthew Breeze. **Crowd:** 2,009. **Venue:** Pittwater Park.
Teams: NORTHERN SPIRIT: Henderson (Page 90'), O'Sullivan, Tobin (Hunter 86'), Tomasevic, Kwasnik, Richter, Fisher (Moulis 88'), Petrie, Wilkinson, Osman, Milligan.
Subs Not Used: Mailer.
ADELAIDE UNITED: Bajic, Alagich, Goulding, Valkanis (Brooks 53'), Terminello, Veart, Vidmar (Thompson 56'), Westervelt, Agius (Saric 61'), Demourtzidis, Pellegrino.
Subs Not Used: Scarsella (gk).
Cautions: V Tomasevic (NS) 72', A Vidmar (AU) 46', A Pellegrino (AU) 84'.

SYDNEY OLYMPIC **0**
SOUTH MELBOURNE **0**

Referee: Simon Micallef. **Crowd:** 3,682.**Venue:** OKI Jubilee Oval.

Teams: SYDNEY OLYMPIC: Hughes, Souris, Kohler, Juric, Schirripa, Fyfe (Baillie 71'), Cardozo, Halpin, Bojic (Elrich 80'), Ishida, Caravella (R Cardozo 58').
Subs Not Used:
SOUTH MELBOURNE: Galekovic, Osman, Storey (Poutakidis 93'), Panopoulos, Kovacevic, Stergiopoulos, Lia, Laurie, Curcija (Murdocca 69'), Sarkies (Trimboli 90'), Tunbridge.
Subs Not Used: Theoklitos (gk).
Cautions: S Storey (SM) 62'.

NSL FINALS SERIES ROUND 1

Elimination Final
1st Leg
Sunday 7-3-04 (2nd Leg 14th March)
(3) Adelaide United vs Brisbane Strikers (6)
Hindmarsh Stadium - 7PM
(4) Marconi Stallions vs South Melbourne (5)
Marconi Stadium - 3.45 PM

Major Semi-Final
1st Leg
Sunday 14-3-04
(1) Perth Glory vs Parramatta Power (2)
Parramatta Stadium - 3.45 PM

MELBOURNE KNIGHTS **0**
SYDNEY UNITED **0**

Referee: Angelo Nardi. **Crowd:** 8,423.**Venue:** Knights Stadium.

Teams: MELBOURNE KNIGHTS: Tomich, R Vargas, Marth, Vasilevski (Razov 66'), Rocco, Leijer, A Vargas, Fa'Arodo, Pelikan, Pantelidis (Erdogan 23', Oksuz 75'), Marinos.
Subs Not Used: Knezevic (gk).
SYDNEY UNITED: Reddy, Haliti, Cunico, Vrkic, Huxley, Parisi (Austin 86'), Heffernan (Markovic 55'), Beldham (Doumanis 68'), Rudan, Zmire, Filipovic.
Subs Not Used: Necevski (gk).
Cautions: A Leijer (MK) 45', A Zmire (SU) 45', M Cunico (SU) 48'.

WOLLONGONG WOLVES **3**
(C Nwaogazi 10', S Young 19', N Sabljak 83')
NEWCASTLE UNITED **0**

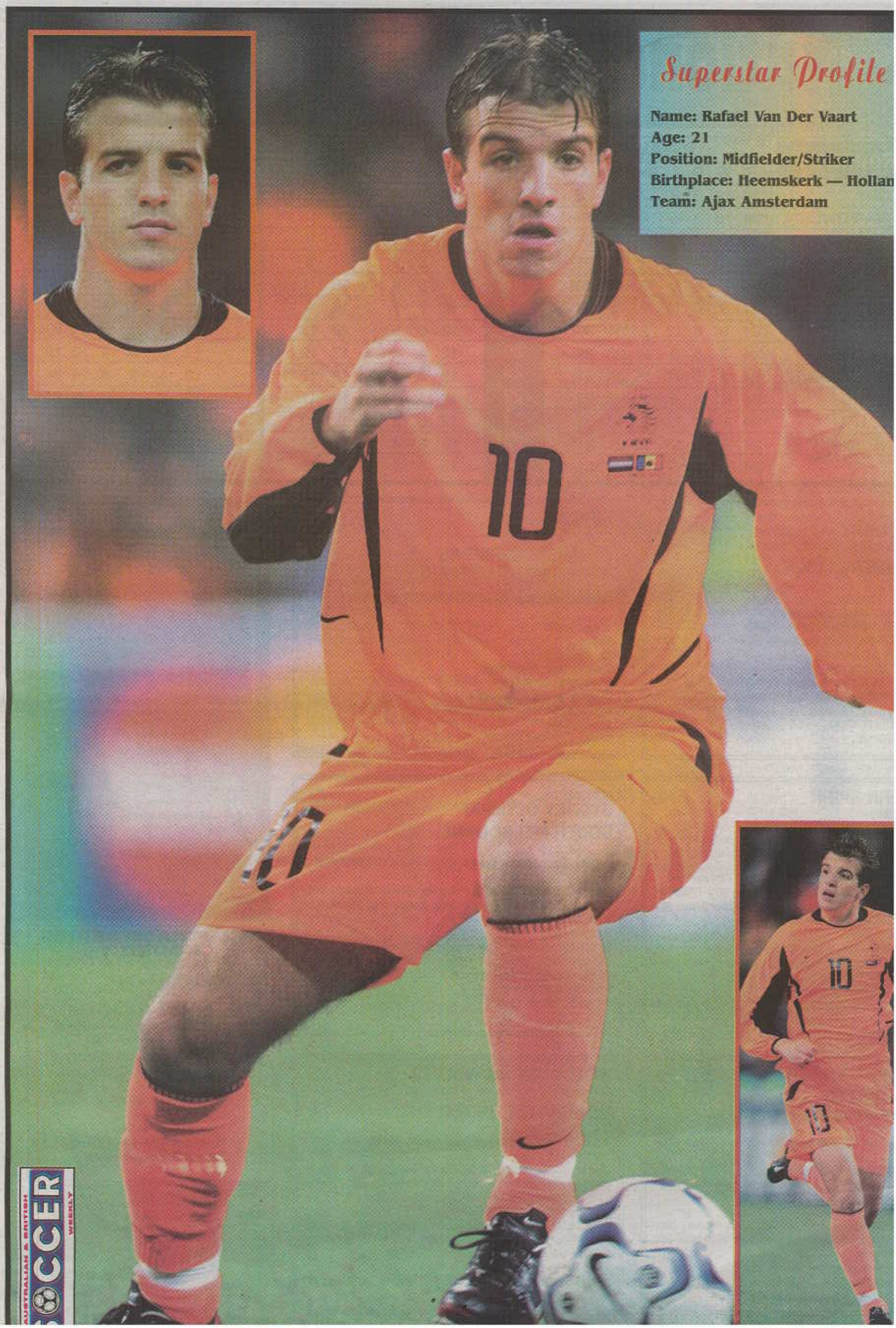
Referee: Peter Green. **Crowd:** 3531. **Venue:** WIN Stadium.

Teams: WOLLONGONG WOLVES: Crews, Dragas, Van Blerk, Hughes, Hawrysiuk (DeGiovianniello 83'), Young, Sabljak, Cummins (Timpano 85'), Van Bentum, Blake, Nwaogazi (Balabanel 77').
Subs Not Used: Angelov (gk).
NEWCASTLE UNITED: Willis Deans, Thomas, Prentice (Boogaard 85'), Wilson (McPherson 65'), R Griffiths, Johnson (Musialik 65'), Tsekenis, Mitchell, Middleby, Libbesson.
Subs Not Used: Kennedy (gk).
Cautions: B Dragas (WW) 14', A Hughes (WW) 51', C Deans (NU) 41', R Middleby (NU) 85.

LEADING GOALSCORERS

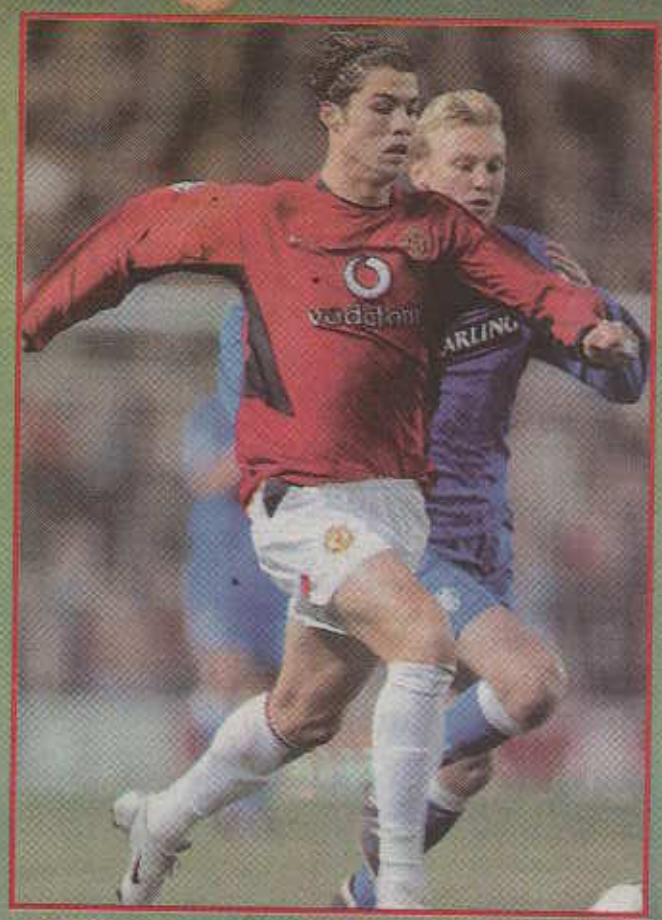
Name	Club	Total
MILICIC Ante	**Parramatta**	**19**
MORI Damian	Perth Glory	14
COVENY Vaughan	Sth Melbourne	12
MRDJA Nick	Perth Glory	12
NWAOGAZI Chima	Wollongong Wolves	11
CURCIJA Michael	Sth Melbourne	10
VEART Carl	Adelaide Utd	10
DESPOTOVSKI Bobby	Perth Glory	9
RECH Fernando	Parramatta	9
CARDOZO Pablo	Sydney Olympic	9
YOUNG Stuart	Wollongong Wolves	8
NGATA Harry	Football Kingz	8

BYE - PARRAMATTA POWER


Superstar Profile
Name: Rafael Van Der Vaart
Age: 21
Position: Midfielder/Striker
Birthplace: Heemskerk — Hollan
Team: Ajax Amsterdam
10
10
10

Superstar Profile #14

Name: Cristiano Ronaldo
Age: 19
Position: Midfielder/Striker
Birthplace: Madeira
Team: Manchester United



from the dressing sheds

by Mark Stavroulakis

NSL FINALS SERIES

What a year its been for the NSL this season.

Known to be the last ever finals series until the introduction of the new APL, the last winner of this years NSL will go down in history that's for sure.

Its no secret that the Perth Glory and Parramatta Power will lock in as firm favourites to take out the title.

For Sydneysiders, hopes are penned to the Power winning the Major Semi as the Grand-Final will be played in Sydney.

Don't count out the chances of JP's Marconi squad who had a tough February schedule but came through it with flying colours.

Coach of the Year favourite John Kosmina will have an experienced Adelaide United squad tackling Australia's best but it remains to be seen how the youngsters will cope the high pressure's of the finals.

South Melbourne, who went ever so well mid-season, suffered an end of year slump and will be struggling if Munro's boys fail to shape up.

The firm outsider to win the Finals, Brisbane will surely have a task on their hands.

Stuart McLaren's squad have done well in getting through to the top six however this is as far as it will go for the Sunshine Coast side.

Get out there and support your clubs.

DOCTORS NOTES PLEASE

It was interesting to see that three out of the six players that were unavailable for the Roos in their friendly draw against Venezuela two-weeks back played for their respective clubs a few days after they told ASA they were not fit to play.

FACT 1:

Osasuna striker John Aloisi played a full game and scored in the 17th minute as his side drew one-all against Mallorca.

FACT 2:

Genclerbirligi midfielder Josip Skoko played a full game as his side won two-nil over Buraspor.

FACT 3:

Blackburn Rovers midfielder Brett Emerton played a full game as his side lost three-two away to Charlton Athletic.

Scotty Chipperfield did not play for FC Basel due to the birth of his first child, Harry Kewell missed Liverpool's fifth round FA Cup replay tie against Porstmouth, while Mark Viduka also missed Leeds United's one-all away draw to Manchester United.

Doctor's notes from the three mentioned in the fact list must have been 'that good' to get away from playing with the Green & Gold.

The ironic aspect is that the three mentioned above were unfit to play in the friendly and yet they all played a solid game of 90 minutes – not bad.

In no way am I doubting the abilities of Aloisi, Skoko or Emerton, its just a bizarre coincidence that they took part in their respective matches no more than 3 days after the friendly in Caracas.

KINGZ SLUMP AGAIN!

Its beyond me why the new ASA board are opting to salvage the Kingz for next seasons new league after the club yet again had a poor season.

The Wooden Spoon was in place for the Kiwis for the second-time in its five-year history after again finishing bottom place.

No real highlights have happened for the club apart from having New Zealand legend Wynton Rufer play and coach the club – its been pretty much a down-hill battle for our Trans-Tasman rivals.

Since their induction in '99, the side finished 8th out of 16 sides, then the following year the same fate was given to the Kingz.

Season 2001/02, the club finished last, while last year, tenth spot was on hand for the then Ken Dugdale led squad. Questions must be raised as to whether the side is capable of playing in Australia's elite competition if results such as their previous seasons suggest.

Its no wonder a number of Sydney and Melbourne clubs are feeling unsettled, having the Kingz take their place on rubs more salt into the wounds of the near-to-extinct National League clubs.

MUSCAT THE BRAVE

Its been written up as the second most expensive tackle in British soccer history, Socceroo Kevin Muscat certainly felt the pinch in his pocket when he and his former club the Wolverhampton Wanderers were fined $1.7 million after a 'horrendous' tackle on Charlton midfielder Matt Holmes.

The tackle, branded by Holmes as 'over the top', pretty much ended his career and there was even a threat of having his leg lost at one stage.

Classed as one of the most feared men in world soccer, it is no secret that Muscat plays with a lot of heart and its been evident that through the bad comes good from the former South Melbourne defender.

An interesting statistic is that Kevin has played 44 times for the Green and Gold and yet a single red card has been banished for any reckless tackles.

Currently the skipper of First Division side Millwall, its been his determination and sheer will of winning everything at any cost that have given him the honour of leading out various squads.

Many observers who have seen Muscat at play believe that the only thing going for him is his bad tackles and his unprofessional attitude towards the game.

Those that have played it though know otherwise.

Football has always been known as a man's game – by all means tackling and the dirty side of kicking and pushing will always be in it.

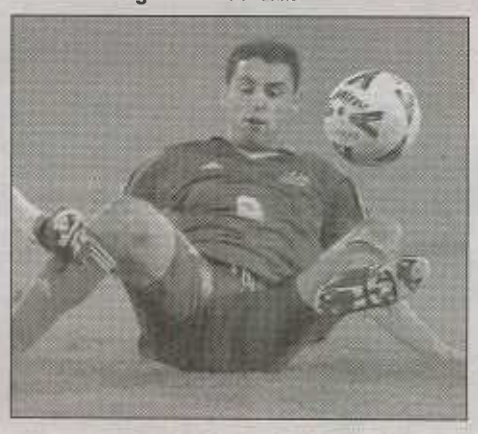
Look at the likes of Roy Keane, Patrick Viera, Edgar Davids, Vinny Jones to name a few.

They base their game around their aggressiveness – sometimes it does go a little over the top but as I stated before, it's in the game.

One incident that sparked international uproar was when good old Muscat sent French International Christophe Dugarry flying for four months with a ferocious tackle.

After the match, "Muscy", stated that the French midfielder spat on him – that resulted in him retaliating in such a way.

Dubbed the 'Wicked of Oz', for his aggression in the game, Muscat is only but a player alongside a list of other names that have done far worse in the game of football.



Studs Up: Kevin Muscat style!

The hard-tackling player should be given a wrap for doing what he does on the field every week.

Not many can play the Bad Guy week in week out and hope to gain friends in the game. Its just business as usual for the Roo whose attitude will certainly be needed come World Cup qualifiers next year.

SOUTH PRESIDENT REVEALS INVESTMENT TALKS

South Melbourne president Peter Mitrakis has confirmed the club is actively pursuing investment partners ahead of submitting their application for next season's revamped National Premier League.

Mitrakis told The Age last week that: "This is probably the last game this club will participate in as South Melbourne Hellas SC Limited. We can't continue as we have been in the national league, where collectively clubs are losing $20 to $30 million a year.

"A club limited by guarantee and supported by its membership cannot participate in the future of the game at elite level. We can't generate the funds . . . If it costs us dearly so be it, but I believe it will not cost us dearly.

"We are working with potential investment partners and joint-venture partners. We are speaking to people to ensure that we can participate in the future of the game. The only way forward for the game is with some government assistance and hard work ... to see a fully covered stadium with crowds of 15,000-20,000 people here enjoying the future."

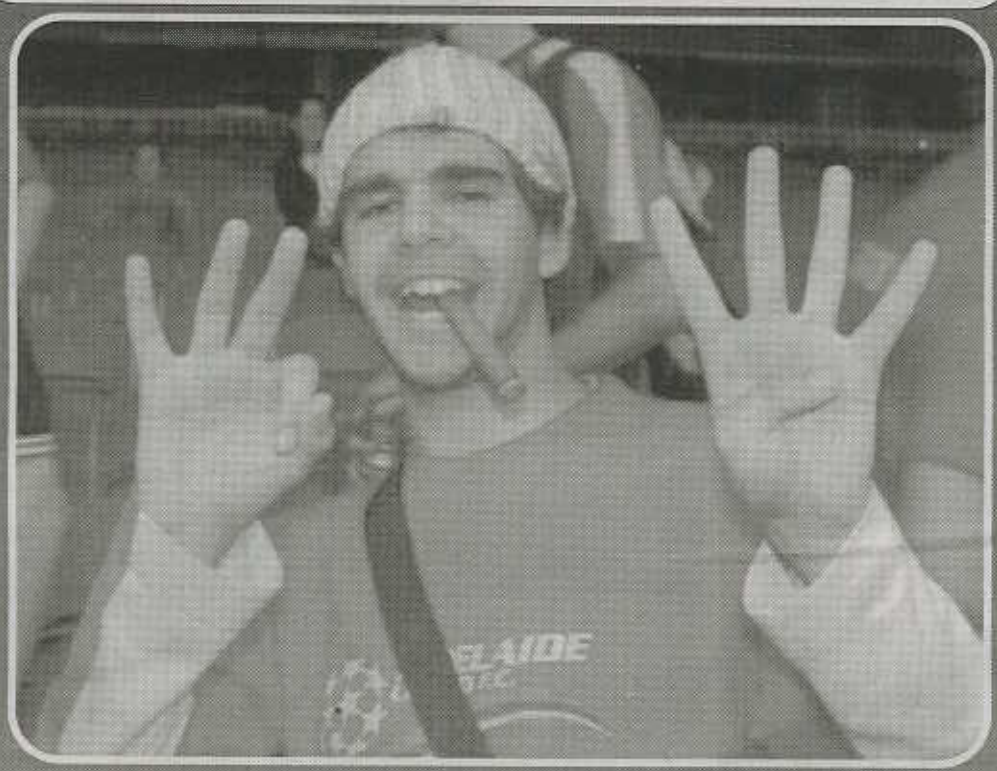
OZ PLAYERS GREET AFRICAN DATE

The announcement of Australia's next international against South Africa in London next month has been greeted warmly by players and coach Frank Farina. "After the last game against Venezuela, the lads can't wait to get together again and perform on the park in England - especially since we are two wins from two games in London for the last 12 months," Blackburn Rovers fullback Lucas Neill said.

"We are all determined to make the World Cup in Germany in 2006 and all our games are important, and South Africa is sure to give our boys a true test. We are looking forward to the match and are hoping that we can get a full house at Loftus Road."

Australia coach Frank Farina said, "The Socceroos are excited about playing in London against our sporting arch rivals, the South Africans. And to be going head to head at such a great football stadium makes the contest with the Bafana Bafana much more of an epic encounter. I really urge all Aussies and South Africans in London to get down to the game and show that our sporting rivalry really means something to both sets of fans, given that our Socceroos truly want to build our home London base of fans."

photooftheweek



Its good to see the support being drummed up by the Adelaide United side especially after their club did the un-thinkable and made this year's NSL Finals Series. Above is a fan who could not hide the smile off his face with a cigar after Adelaide disposed of the Melbourne Knights four-three - keep up the support guys!

RUFER FOR AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR

New Zealand great Wynton Rufer was asked by ASA officials last year to become an ambassador for Australian football.

New Zealand football legend Wynton Rufer has confirmed he was asked to become an ambassador for Australia football last year. Rufer has had a difficult relationship with NZ Soccer officials and was approached by Australian SA officials at the 2006 World Cup draw about representing Australia around the world.

The former Werder Bremen star told the National Business Review he'd actually been asked twice to join Australia's cause.

"The first time was in Frankfurt last year when I was representing Oceania at the 2006 World Cup preliminary draw celebrations." Rufer said.

"Representatives of Soccer Australia then approached me about the role."

NSW PREMIER LEAGUE

Blacktown runs riot over a floundering Parramatta

Blacktown City Demons	4
Parramatta Eagles	1

By Paul Goodwin

The Parramatta Eagles buckled against Blacktown City at The Gabbie on Saturday night.

Stung by two goals in the first eleven minutes - one of them a superb strike from Josh Maguire that no team could have defended against - the Eagles lost 4-1. All of the goals coming before the break.

Eagle's coach Trevor Morgan was visibly shaken by his sides collapse and horrified at how they had made so many basic defensive mistakes, in a game where they had just as much of the attacking opportunities as their opponents.

"We had eleven chances to their eight in the first half and yet we let them score all the goals," he said.

Missing only the injured Vic Costabile from his normal starting line up and electing to leave Andy Kane and Ishmael Arrarte on the bench, Morgan was devastated to see his young charges, who have had some rotten luck of late, squandering early chances. They left gaps that a tank could drive through and conceded three goals to what he described as terrible defending.

Mittiga's muscle: Despite missing an easy conversion attempt Anthony Mittiga 'made amends' with a whalloping goal from thirty-five-yards out

Blacktown got their noses in front after less than seven minutes when a long clearance out of defence allowed Dominic Magill to burst into the Parramatta penalty area and shrug aside two defenders before beating Peter Munsie with a decisive finish.

That set back was enough to show that the visitor's failure to put away a good fourth minute chance offered to Paul Down would cost them dearly.

Down's low drive was palmed away by Demon's keeper John Crawley to the relief of the locals.

Then came the Maguire goal. No fewer than six Blacktown players were involved in the build up which led to Maguire letting fly with a first-time lob that lodged in the top left corner of Munsie's net from fully thirty yards.

Blacktown coach Brian Brown was very pleased with his sides efforts.

"I think we played some of our best football today and it was very pleasing."

Rocked by this further punishment Parramatta attacked relentlessly for the next passage of play, but failed to get the goals they wanted to get the game back in their reach. Instead Blacktown grabbed a third in the 27th minute.

Before that, Matthew Clowes had sprung the Demon's trap and with Rod Hutchinson in support went on to face Crawley in the 21st.

But the keeper was saved any blushes as Clowes elected to pass when he already had a clear sight of goal and the wily Crawley soon had Hutchinson's measure as the former Penrith and Canterbury man was forced wide and eventually lost control of the ball.

Marcus Phillips was the architect of Blacktown's third. He threaded a ball through, down the left and the speedy Tony Faria and the earlier scorer Magill both found themselves almost fighting for the chance to score from a tight angle.

The defence was already flat-footed and out of the picture as the Demons' newest signing, Faria, took the initiative and slammed a low left-footer across goal and in at the far post.

In the 38th the Eagles were awarded what looked a dubious penalty after Nathan Rivera had broken through into the area only to run out of room when confronted by a wall of defenders, colliding with Dane Hokin.

Referee Srebre Delovski pointed to the spot, but Tony Mittiga's conversion attempt was poor and Crawley was able to make a simple save, low to his right.

"Visibly shaken": Parramatta coach Trevor Morgan

Brown felt that Crawley had enjoyed one of his poorer games, but his saves were good enough and it was mainly his distribution that his coach found fault with.

On this occasion it hardly mattered. Before the game the skipper had been presented with a plaque to mark his 100th game in Demon's colours.

Mittiga almost made amends for his side with a fabulous thirty-five-yard screamer in the 39th but Crawley was able to tip the effort over the Blacktown bar. His lack of luck typified Parramatta's day.

Once more Blacktown responded by putting away another goal of their own.

Faria was allowed space down the left — where he had troubled the Eagles all day — and got the ball over to the far post for a relatively easy tap-in by Magill.

"It was awful defending by us," said Morgan after the game, "we never picked him up at all at the far post and that is just not good enough."

It was a day when everything went right for Blacktown, after a recent run of bad luck, while the visitor's ill fortune of recent weeks was prolonged for another seven days.

They did at least get a goal to savour in the 44th minute, when poor marking allowed Mittiga the space to try another long range effort. This time his shot was low, from the centre, and at a range of about thirty-yards, beating the keeper who may well have been unsighted.

The second half saw Parramatta knuckle down to their task and put in a much stronger effort.

There were no more goals, but Damien Foxe did have to head off the Blacktown line, when Crawley came out of his area to tackle substitute Andy Kane and got stranded in the 70th and Crawley also had to make good saves from Matt O'Shea and Kane on other occasions.

Parramatta coach Morgan moved a new man into the sweeper's spot and the re-arrangement of the defence made a big difference.

The Demons rarely troubled the Eagles in the second period and were caught offside far more often than they had been in the first half.

Superb strike: Josh Maguire opened the scoring with a goal that 'no team could have defended against'

Blacktown seemed content to defend, as they needed to and brought on fifteen-year-old Scott Jamieson for his first grade debut in the closing moments.

Jamieson's father, Alex, had appeared in the colours of his beloved Melita Eagles in a 'legends' game, which had been the curtain raiser, a game won by Blacktown 2-1 with both goals coming from the wonder boot of Lawrie McKinna, the first a superb distance strike and the second a cool, close range finish.

It was a day for goals and made up for the scoreless Grade 20 game that had begun the day early at 3.30 pm.

Blacktown were missing the suspended Kain Rastall and the long-term injured Simon Catanzaro.

BLACKTOWN CITY DEMONS 4
(D Magill 6'/41', J Maguire 10', T Faria 27')
PARRAMATTA EAGLES 1
(A Mittiga 44')
at Gabbie Stadium, Seven Hills

BLACKTOWN CITY DEMONS: John Crawley (C), Damien Foxe, Ben Willard , Dane Hokin (Paul Karbon 86), Marcus Phillips (Brian Vanega 63), Patrick Gatt, Josh Maguire, Paul Urlovic, Tony Faria, Luke Roodenburg, Dominic Magill (Scott Jamieson 85)
Sub not used: RGK Nick Jelic, Stephen Kayes
Coach: Brian Brown

PARRAMATTA EAGLES: Peter Munsie, Mark Reveley (C), John Kelso, Matthew Rosier (Simon Zahra 63), Matthew O'Shea, Paul Down (Andy Kane 59), Ben Delicata, Matthew Clowes, Anthony Mittiga, Nathan Rivera, Rod Hutchinson (Ismael Arrarte 59)
Subs not used: RGK Ben Paneccasio
Coach: Trevor Morgan

Referee: Srebre Delovski
Assistant Referees: Jim Barnes and Danny Adamopoulos
Fourth Official: Not used
Yellow Cards: Blacktown: Luke Roodenburg 25, Dane Hokin 42; Parramatta: Nil

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PHOTOGRAPHY: Carlos Furtado
● *All information is courtesy of SOCCER NSW*

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Coast hangs on to foil Crescent charge

By Greg Stock

Sydney Crescent Star	1
Central Coast United	1

Central Coast stretched their unbeaten run to three games, holding a disappointing Sydney Crescent Star to a hard fought one-all draw at Lidcombe Oval on Sunday afternoon.

Leading one-nil going into the last sixty seconds of the match, United couldn't hold out a desperate final assault by the home side, conceding a goal to substitute Philip Marzec with literally the last kick of the game.

"It is terribly disappointing when you go so close to getting a full three points and get beaten right at the death," said coach Jim Foley, "but full credit to the boys. They did as much as they possibly could and to take a point away from Lidcombe Oval is some consolation."

The turning point of the match came five minutes from time when defender Sean Matthews was substituted after a torrid clash with Crescent Star midfielder Anthony Hartshorn.

Matthews departure forced a reshuffle of the well-organised United defence which allowed Crescent Star the space it needed in the final few minutes to score a dramatic equalizer.

Having been well contained for most of the game, the home side raced forward from a United turnover on their forward line, the ball ending up with Marzec who deftly turn his marker and fired a shot from just inside the area that beat Matthew Trott.

"We were exceptionally lucky to get out of jail tonight," said a thankful assistant coach Yucel Celenk, "we played without any real creativity and allowed our opponents to play a defensive style of football which frustrated us."

Right from the opening whistles Crescent Star just did not seem their usual free-flowing self and allowed themselves to get bogged down by a United side that got ten men behind the ball.

When they did venture forward they caused problems on the break, but their moments of genuine inspiration were few and far between.

The only real chance of significance came via an Evangelos Petratos header from a corner that was cleared from the line early in the second-half.

The visitors seized the advantage in the 59th minute when Daniel Surridge manufactured a well taken goal by cutting inside Askin Oygur after a strong run downfield to drill a shot just over the head of a flat-footed Vaneja Ivesa.

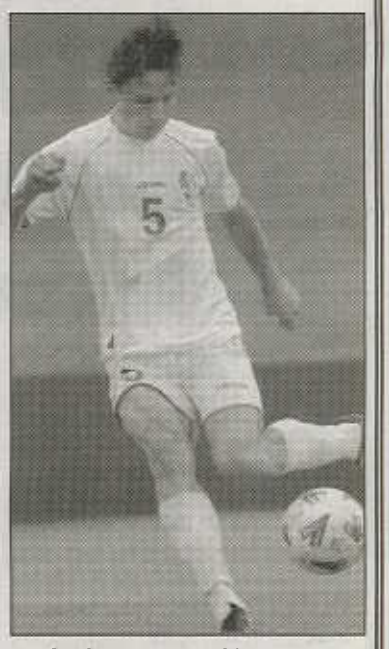
The goal galvanized the Coasties, who defended stoutly until the final minute.

"We just lacked any spark or inspiration tonight," Celenk said, "it was a struggle and we were made to pay by being so lethargic."

Coasties defender Beau Bush was one of his sides best, though he did finish the game a little worse for wear. Bush was taken from the field just before the half-time break after a nasty head clash opened up a cut above his right eye.

The Coast's physiotherapist Barry Brown worked on the youngster during the break and courageously he returned to the field to play a commanding second-half.

Coastal 'stars': United keep Crescent Star at bay until the 94th minute



Saving grace: Philip Marzec ensured that Crescent Star came away with a point

SYDNEY CRESCENT STAR 1
(P Marzec 94')
CENTRAL COAST UNITED 1
(D Surridge 59')
at Lidcombe Oval, Auburn

SYDNEY CRESCENT STAR: Vaneja Ivesa, Evangelos Petratos, Askin Oygur, Ulur Tokdonnan, Joe Brunl (Shane Hammond), Anthony Hartshorn, Yavus Ekinci, Terry Atsas (Philip Marzec), Daniel Willoughby, Orhan Dincer (Hakan Sevgin), Tolgay Ozbey.
Coach: Yasin Ozdenak.

CENTRAL COAST UNITED: Matthew Trott, Doug West, Sean Matthews (Aaron Binskin), Beau Bush, Matthew Mitchell, John Bennis, Mitchell Daley, Daniel Surridge, Peter Haynes, Marc Falzon, Nathan Byrn (Kristian Shepherd).
Coach: Jim Foley.

Referee: Craig Pearce

Assistant Referees: Leo Romero and Wayne Crabb.
Fourth Official: Sandro Perticarini.

"We didn't turn up to play": Rasmussen

By Greg Stock

Bankstown City Lions	4
Penrith Panthers	1

"Poor" was how Penrith coach Tony Rasmussen summed up his side's effort when beaten 4-1 by Bankstown City Lions at Jensen Park on Sunday afternoon.

"It was one of the poorest games we have played in months. We just didn't turn up to play tonight," he said.

In sharp contrast Bankstown did come to play, racking up an impressive scoreline which stamps them as genuine top-five material. Five weeks ago they were in all sorts of trouble languishing in the bottom five, but the turnaround has been remarkable, and the way in which they disposed of the weak Penrith challenge impressive.

"We showed excellent concentration tonight and really went on with the job," Lions coach Andy Papoulias said.

"We looked comfortable at the back and apart from conceding a silly goal we kept their genuine chances down to a minimum, and created some good opportunities ourselves."

The stars of the show were undoubtedly Sean Babic and Matthew Borg. Their pace and skill was just too much for the young Panthers defenders who constantly found themselves back pedalling as the two speedsters cut loose.

Babic got his side off on the right foot when he slammed home a shot in the 12th minute after Robert Gomez effected a steal on the normally reliable Luke O'Connell.

Despite conceding a soft equalizer to Roger Galayini in the 21st minute, the Lions were back in front at the break when Richard Luksic scored a spectacular goal in the 27th minute, throwing his left foot to a corner at the back post that had been nodded on by Borg.

But the best was yet to come, with the Lions really putting their foot down on the accelerator late in the second-half, scoring two goals and cutting the Panthers defence to ribbons.

If not for the goal-keeping heroics of Chad Taylor they would have had a couple more, as the Penrith number one used every inch of his small frame to make three telling saves.

George Nohra scrambled the ball over the line in the 77th minute after Taylor had twice denied Borg at close range before the leagues leading scorer raced away in injury time to round Taylor and defender Ryan Noble to put away his sides fourth deep into injury time.

"We have been working on our concentration and to see us play so well for a full ninety minutes is very encouraging," Papoulias said, "our counterattacks tonight were excellent and if we can continue to move the ball forward like that we will be hard to beat."

The win comes without telling contributions from two of Bankstown's better performers, Marc Hoenselaars and Robert Mileski. Hoenselaars came on in the final twelve minutes, and is on his long road back from an ankle injury while Mileski watched proceedings from the grandstand as he recovers from a hamstring strain.

The concern for Rasmussen, however, is the way in which his side floundered after equalizing midway through the first half.

"We just didn't have the heart tonight. The boys were pumped for the Blacktown match last week and seem to have forgotten about this game," he said.

Despite being outplayed, Penrith did have a controversial handball waved away by referee Sam D'Imperio ten minutes from time when the score was still at 3-1.

"Maybe it was a handball, but either way we just did not deserve anything tonight."

BANKSTOWN CITY LIONS 4
(S Babic 11', R Luksic 26', G Nohra 77', M Borg 92')
PENRITH PANTHERS 1
(R Galayani 20')
at Jensen Park, Sefton

BANKSTOWN CITY LIONS: Zlatko Josevski, Milan Bosnar (Steve Liavas 85'), Richard Luksic, Matthew Pressello, Paul Wearne, Geoff Dwyer (Dimitri Nicolaou 46'), Robert Gomez, Matthew Borg, George Nohra (Marc Hoenselaars 81'), Sean Babic, Sash Trajcevski.
Coach: Andy Papoulias.

PENRITH PANTHERS: Chad Taylor, Ryan Noble, Malcolm Mellak (Jason Solberras 73'), Allan Wawi (Danny Hinton 85'), Chad Lewis, Roger Galayini, Daniel McCann, Paul Marcsevic (Peter Bennett 46'), Jason Connolly, Luke Boyd, Luke O'Connell.
Coach: Tony Rasmussen

Cautions: L.O'Connell (PP) 43, Galayini (PP) 44, Bennett (PP) 53, Noble (PP) 75.
Referee: Sam D'Imperio

Asistant Referees: David Finlay and Richard Keep
Fourth Official: Nick Asargiotis

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A.P.I.A.'s 'best shot' falls short

A.P.I.A. Leichhardt	0
Bonnyrigg White Eagles	1

By Paul Goodwin

A.P.I.A. and Bonnyrigg played out a 'battle royale' at Lambert Park on Sunday evening in what turned out to be a fiery contest and one that senior referee Jim Nikolaou had his hands full controlling.

It was a tempestuous affair settled by the simplest and most well taken of goals by Jimmy Aschner midway through the first half.

In between there were many flying tackles, lots of aggression and a will to win from both sides, but sadly for the home side, their will could not stop a fourth loss on the trot.

The White Eagles know just how they feel. It is not long since they ended their own horror stretch of six games in a row without a single point.

This time it could so easily have been all tied up. But clearly with both sides so determined to win and Bonnyrigg running back into form again, it was A.P.I.A. who were punished as the visitors claimed a rare double over them for the season.

With so many of their first round games being losses they won't have a chance to turn many more return fixtures into doubles.

The early exchanges were even enough but once Bonnyrigg hit the front they did tend to look well in control, much like the Bonnyrigg of old.

Aaron Burgess on the right sent over a delightfully crisp diagonal ball to the far side of the area where Aschner let fly with a first-time volley that fairly rocketed into the net from twenty-yards out and landed in the bottom right corner of the A.P.I.A. net, leaving Brad Swancott spread-eagled.

A.P.I.A. had some wretched luck in the 19th minute when Jeremy Brown managed to smash a shot against the underside of the bar after Paul Dee had made a great run down the right and put over a pinpoint cross to Brown just inside the Bonnyrigg area.

At the other end, in the 21st, one-time A.P.I.A. skipper Sam Larocca almost doubled his side's lead with a shot that went out off the left hand post for a corner following a defender's deflection when the ball had originally looked goal-bound.

George Radmanovic's corner in the 30th produced a great header at the near post from Alex Canak that looked destined for the top right corner of the net until Damon Langan came to the rescue with a header off the line.

Norman Tome had A.P.I.A. supporters getting excited in the 38th but after racing into the box he turned well and then steered his shot well over the bar with Bonnyrigg defenders standing off him.

Aschner had the ball in the back of the A.P.I.A. net again in the 42nd, but referee Nikolaou had to rule it out as the striker controlled the ball with his hand as he collected it from a nice threaded through pass from Larocca.

There were plenty of thrill and spills too, in a blood and thunder second half.

Larocca shot only inches wide of the left post in the 48th, and James Monie for A.P.I.A. glanced a header just wide from a Tome corner in the 50th.

Canak had his shot well claimed by Swancott at the other end as the game continued to ebb and flow.

While chances were being created, most of the attention was on the action in the middle of the park.

One time Bonnyrigg man Paul Dee suffered what looked to be a nasty leg injury after fiercely contesting a fifty-fifty ball with a Bonnyrigg defender and had to be carried off on a stretcher.

The game hung in the balance but the visitors did look the more dangerous of the two sides as they ventured forward at every opportunity.

Their main task towards the end was to keep possession but they did not find that easy with A.P.I.A. battling away so well.

Right near the end of the six-minutes of stoppage time Zlatko Arambasic - who was under tight hold all game - got on the end of a Robbie Stanton free kick only to glance his header wide at the far post.

Bonnyrigg were worthy winners in a high quality game. It was A.P.I.A.'s misfortune to meet the White Eagles as they embark on a journey that is now gaining full momentum.

Few sides would have been able to beat them on this Sunday and A.P.I.A. gave it their best shot and it proved not quite enough to snare at least a point.

A.P.I.A. LEICHHARDT TIGERS 0
BONNYRIGG WHITE EAGLES 1
(J Aschner 18')
at Lambert Park, Leichhardt

A.P.I.A.-LEICHHARDT TIGERS: Brad Swancott, Paul Dee (David Barrett 56'), Michael Galluzzo, Damon Langan (C), Andrew Clark, Paul Bilokapic, Robbie Stanton, Jeremy Brown (Tony Allovic 67), Zlatko Arambasic, James Monie, Norman Tome.
Subs not used: RGK Stewart Vella, Tony Tesoro and Robbie Hooker
Coach: Les DeCelis

BONNYRIGG WHITE EAGLES: Cem Aklili, Mark D'Alessandro, Sam Larocca, Tayfun Devrimci, Devrim Huseyin (Chris Fleming 60), Greg Collins, Alex Canak, George Radmanovic (Milorad Simonovic 89), Shane Knight (C), Aaron Burgess, Jimmy Aschner (Brad Groves 81)
Subs not used: (RGK) Ali Akbal, Dejan Malenica
Coach: Gordon Brown
Referee: Jim Nikolaou
Assistant Referees: Michael Collins and Adam Susz
Fourth Official: Greg Leadbeatter
Yellow Cards: A.P.I.A.-Leichhardt: Andrew Clark 43, David Barrett 77; Bonnyrigg: George Radmanovic 54

Belconnen overwhelm a valiant Canterbury

By Paul Goodwin

In the first half of this thrilling match Canterbury-Marrickville took the game to Belconnen and looked for all the world like championship contenders, rather than a team down on their luck as other have suggested. This despite Belconnen taking an early lead.

In the fourth minute Canterbury's veteran keeper, Bob Caitlin, casually threw the ball out to his defender on the right flank, Archie Markopoulos, who approached the ball in much the same frame of mind.

Belconnen's Ilija Prenzoski darted in, pinched the ball from Markopoulos, went down to the line and sent a firm ball in to the dashing David Arranz who stabbed it past Caitlin.

Seven minutes later, Oscar Zamora's quick thinking nearly brought a second goal for Belconnen.

Zamora took a quick free kick, finding Arranz again, but after taking the ball well on his chest it then bobbled safely to Caitlin.

Shortly after, a brilliant opportunistic goal from Canterbury put them back into the game.

From a long throw on the left in the 15th, the defenders allowed the ball to bounce and Steve Karavatakis executed an overhead kick, giving Tony Giannasca no chance.

The Karavatakis goal spurred the Berries on and after that they took the match to Belconnen.

In the 32nd minute Aheleas Kotsopoulos was only prevented from scoring by a magnificent tackle from Belconnen's veteran Toplica Popovich and Giannasca, who had to be alert to reach a neat header from Allan Picken.

At the other end Caitlin turned over a thirty-yard shot from Castro and then took a Zamora volley which had been fired straight at him.

Kotsopoulos then saw his shot deflect off Lee Pietrukowski's foot and then Giannasca in an immediate Blue Devils' response. Already committed, he watched as the ball spun over his head but landed on the top of the net.

'Casual': Caitlin's lazy throw saw Belconnen open the scoring

Catlin then had to summon all his experience to take the ball from Prenzoski's feet without committing a foul, but he did this supremely well.

Soon after Karavatakis had two opportunities to put Canterbury into the lead and only the most partisan Belconnen supporter would have begrudged the Sydney team that privilege.

Firstly, Karavatakis took a ball on the volley from a cross and cannoned the ball off the bar, with Giannasca well beaten. Then a minute before half-time, he had a wonderful chance when he intercepted a poor back pass, side-stepping Giannasca, but thundered another shot which amazingly hit the bar in the very same spot as his previous shot.

"A thrilling match": The Belconnen Canterbury game proved to be a fiery contest with a 'will to win' on both sides

So the two sides trooped off at half-time, at a level pegging. Canterbury's coach, John Sentas must have been quite satisfied with his team's play but Chris Tanzey gave his team a rocket.

The Blue Devils were a different team in the second half and were more committed in every department. Their second goal, however, was more down to luck than anything else.

An innocuous ball in the Canterbury penalty area, in the 53rd, took a wicked bounce and Picken was the unfortunate defender who instinctively stuck out a hand to stop the ball. Referee Jonathon Streater, had no hesitation in pointing to the spot. Anthony Galliozzi, who was standing in for the suspended Danny Macor, beat Catlin well to put the Blue Devils back into the lead.

It was only now that Belconnen began to play with an assurance and style that delighted the large crowd with Prenzoski, Castro, Arranz and Galliozzi combining to create some stunning plays.

Galliozzi put away a lovely pass from Arranz for the third goal for Belconnen, and in stoppage time Prenzoski beat the offside trap for the fourth.

Both coaches were philosophical about their respective teams' fortunes.

Sentas bemoaned the fact that his team had gifted Belconnen their first two goals, but appreciated that at the end Belconnen deserved the win.

"The boys are improving all the time but the heads went down after their second goal and we couldn't get back into the game after that," he said.

Sentas was looking forward to getting George Souris into the team after his spell with Olympic and said he would be "trying a few things" on Tuesday night in the Continental Tyres Cup game against Hakoah.

Sadly for him he was relieved of his duties with a phone call from the club while he was still enjoying his weekend in Canberra.

Tanzey was quite forthright about his team's first-half display that he described "as the worst performance since I have been here".

He also said that he had to use some "well-chosen" words for his half-time talk and he was very pleased with the turn around in the second-half.

Tanzey had some words of praise for the whole second half-team and also for the youngsters who stepped up on this occasion, following injuries, suspensions and some player losses to the ACT Premier League, nominating Adam Williams and David Leet in particular.

Tanzey indicated that, due to a number of injuries, some of these youngsters would also get a chance for the Wednesday night Cup game against MSC Liverpool.

BELCONNEN BLUE DEVILS 4
(D Arranz 3', A Galliozzi 52'/85', I Prenzoski 93')
CANTERBURY MARRICKVILLE . .1
(S Karavatakis 14')
at McKellar Soccer Centre, McKellar

BELCONNEN BLUE DEVILS: Tony Giannasca (C), Lee Pietrukowski (Adam Williams 72, Adrian Dowling, Toplica Popovich, Oscar Zamora, Alex Castro, Elliot Zwangobane , Nic Purdue, David Arranz, Ilija Prenzoski, Anthony Galliozzi (David Leet 87)
Subs not used: Jimmy Carr (RGK), Patrick Lloyd, David Brouwer
Coach: Chris Tanzey

CANTERBURY-MARRICKVILLE: Bob Catlin, Sasa Utjesenovic, Ben Price, John Kyriazopoulos, David Harding, Allan Picken (David Gardiner 74), Steve Karavatakis (Peter Bouzanis 83), Aheleas Kotsopoulos, Archie Markopoulos (Cormack Begley 54) Paul Bourke, Alex Leris
Subs not used: RGK Murray Nelson
Coach: John Sentas.

Referee: Jonathon Streater
Assistant Referees: Les O'Donoghue and Ned Sparkes
Fourth Official: Bill Simeonovic
Yellow Cards: Belconnen: David Arranz; Canterbury-Marrickville: Allan Picken

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FIRST GRADE RESULTS & TABLES

Rockdale City Suns . . . . . .P
Belconnen Blue Devils 4
(D Arranz 3', A Galliozzi 52'/85', I Prenzoski 93')
Blacktown City Demons 4
(D Magill 6'/41', J Maguire 10', T Faria 27')
A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers 0

Sydney Crescent Star 1
(F Marzec 94')
Bankstown City Lions 3
(S Babic 11', R Luksic 26', G Nohra 77', M Borg 92')

St George Saints . . . . . .P
Canterbury-Marrickville 1
(S Karavatakis 14')
Parramatta Eagles 1
(A Mittiga 44')
Bonnyrigg White Eagles 1
(J Aschner 18')
Central Coast United 1
(D Surridge 59')
Penrith Panthers 1
(R Galayani 20')

	P	W	D	L	F	A	D	Pts
St George Saints	12	9	2	1	26	10	16	29
Belconnen Blue Devils	13	7	3	3	29	18	11	24
Blacktown City Demons	13	7	1	5	24	16	8	22
Bankstown City Lions	13	6	2	5	27	22	5	20
Penrith Panthers	13	6	2	5	16	21	-5	20
Rockdale City Suns	12	5	3	4	17	19	-2	18
Sydney Crescent Star	13	4	4	5	16	15	1	16
Parramatta Eagles	13	3	5	5	17	20	-3	14
Bonnyrigg White Eagles	13	4	2	7	16	20	-4	14
A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers	13	4	2	7	14	19	-5	14
Central Coast United	13	4	2	7	15	25	-10	14
Canterbury Marrickville	13	3	2	8	14	26	-12	11

GRADE 20 RESULTS & TABLES

Rockdale City Suns . . . . . .P
Belconnen Blue Devils 1
(D Leet 61')
Blacktown City Demons 0
A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers 1
(B Jenke 65')
Sydney Crescent Star 3
(H Sevgin 6'/28', E Turk 83')
Bankstown City Lions 0

St George Saints . . . . . .P
Canterbury-Marrickville 4
(D Di Mento 20', C Bekiaris 35', A Markopoulos 62', M Epsimos 97')
Parramatta Eagles 0
Bonnyrigg White Eagles 1
(A Dizdaric 81')
Central Coast United 2
(D Cooper 75', T Quilty 80')
Penrith Panthers 1
(M Noro 32')

	P	W	D	L	F	A	D	Pts
Parramatta Eagles	13	9	2	2	28	6	22	29
A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers	13	9	2	2	28	11	17	29
Bonnyrigg White Eagles	13	8	3	2	29	18	11	27
Penrith Panthers	13	7	1	5	23	17	6	22
Blacktown City Demons	13	6	2	5	20	19	1	20
Belconnen Blue Devils	13	5	4	4	16	18	-2	19
Bankstown City Lions	13	5	4	4	15	21	-6	19
Canterbury Marrickville	13	4	2	7	20	29	-9	14
Central Coast United	13	2	4	7	19	23	-4	10
St George Saints	12	3	1	8	12	20	-8	10
Rockdale City Suns	12	2	3	7	15	33	-18	9
Sydney Crescent Star	13	2	2	9	15	25	-10	8

NEXT ROUND 14

FIRST GRADE

HOME TEAM		AWAY TEAM	DATE	KICK-OFF	GROUND
St George Saints	v	A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers	Sat. 6th March	7.00pm	St George Stadium
Bonnyrigg White Eagles	v	Sydney Crescent Star	Sat. 6th March	7.00pm	Serbian Centre
Penrith Panthers	v	Belconnen Blue Devils	Sat. 6th March	7.00pm	Cook Park (St Marys)
Central Coast United	v	Blacktown City Demons	Sat. 6th March	7.00pm	Pluim Park
Canterbury Marrickville	v	Rockdale City Suns	Sun. 7th March	5.00pm	Henson Park
Parramatta Eagles	v	Bansktown City Lions	Sun. 7th March	6.00pm	Melita Stadium

GRADE 20

HOME TEAM		AWAY TEAM	DATE	KICK-OFF	GROUND
St George Saints	v	A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers	Sat. 6th March	5.00pm	St George Stadium
Bonnyrigg White Eagles	v	Sydney Crescent Star	Sat. 6th March	5.00pm	Serbian Centre
Penrith Panthers	v	Belconnen Blue Devils	Sat. 6th March	5.00pm	Cook Park (St Marys)
Central Coast United	v	Blacktown City Demons	Sat. 6th March	5.00pm	Pluim Park
Canterbury Marrickville	v	Rockdale City Suns	Sun. 7th March	3.00pm	Henson Park
Parramatta Eagles	v	Bansktown City Lions	Sun. 7th March	4.00pm	Melita Stadium

LEADING GOALSCORERS

As of Sunday 29th February 2004

11	Matthew Borg (BCL)
10	Ilija Prenzoski (BBD)
8	Daniel Macor (BBD), Bruno Beddoni (SG)
7	Jason Connolly (PP)
6	Anthony Galliozzi (BBD)
5	Daniel Watkins (SG), Norman Tome (AL), Aaron Burgess (BWE), Nathan Byrn (CCU), Dominic McGill (BCD), Sean Babic (BCL)
4	Paul Urlovic (BCD), Ben Deighan (RCS), Denis Alilovic (RCS), Ben Delicata (PE), Luke Roodenburg (BCD), Steve Karavatakis (CMO)
3	James Kovas (SG), Goce Trposki (RCS), Marc Falzon (CCU), Simon Catanzaro (BCD), Tony Ju (RCS), Ante Deur (SG), Sam Larocca (CMO/BWE), Marcus Phillips (BCD), Peter Haynes (CCU), David Arranz (BBD), Filip Marzec (SCS), Roger Galayini (PP)
2	Hakan Sevgin (SCS), Manny Papageorgiou (BWE), Zlatko Arambasic (ALT), Demitri Nicolaou (BCL), Robert Mileski (BCL), Yavuz Ekinci (SCS), Alex Asanovic (BCL), James Monie (AL), Vic Costabile (PE), Daniel McCann (PP), Orhan Dincer (SCS), Aheleas Kotsopoulos (CMO), Raphael Bove (SG), Greg Collins (BWE), Michael Debono (PE), Anthony Hartshorn (SCS), Josh Maguire (BCD), Tony Faria (BCD), Anthony Mittiga (PE), George Nohra (BCL)

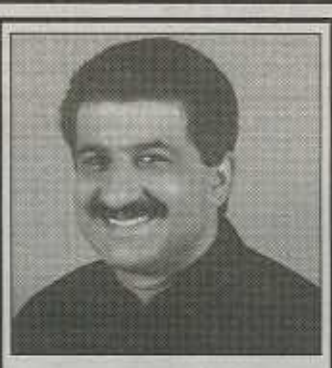
NSW PREMIER LEAGUE TIPPING COLUMN

PAUL GOODWIN
SOCCER NSW JOURNALIST
A.P.I.A. LEICHHARDT
BONNYRIGG
BELCONNEN
BLACKTOWN
CANTERBURY
DRAW

Points = 29

TARYN ROCKALL
NSW SAPPHIRES CAPTAIN
ST GEORGE
DRAW
BELCONNEN
BLACKTOWN
ROCKDALE
BANKSTOWN

Points = 26



ANDY PASCHALIDIS
ELITE SPORTS TRAVEL
ST GEORGE
BONNYRIGG
BELCONNEN
BLACKTOWN
ROCKDALE
PARRAMATTA

Points = 31

GREG STOCK
SOCCER NSW JOURNALIST
ST GEORGE
BONNYRIGG
PENRITH
BLACKTOWN
ROCKDALE
BANKSTOWN

Points = 31

'PEANUTS'
THE MONKEY
ST GEORGE
BONNYRIGG
PENRITH
BLACKTOWN
ROCKDALE
BANKSTOWN

Points = 29

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ROUND 14 PREVIEW

WITH PAUL GOODWIN & GREG STOCK

St George Saints VS A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers

Saturday 6th March at St George Stadium
Kick-off 7.00pm First Grade / 5.00pm Grade 20

One of the biggest mysteries in the game at present is the lack of form of A.P.I.A.-Leichhardt. Despite having one of the most experienced squads on paper in the league, they have been on a downward spiral since they beat Bankstown City in round eight.

Four straight losses have them riding the tightrope of early elimination from the top five, but a more worrying sign for coach Les DeCelis is his side's lack of potency in front of goals.

The Tigers have netted just once in four weeks and must surely rush new signing Jimmy Nikas into the starting line-up this week for their clash with the Saints.

St. George, by contrast, has netted ten goals in their last four games for a maximum return of twelve competition points.

To make matters worse for A.P.I.A., ace marksman Stuart Young will join the club this week from NSL side Wollongong City and looks certain to start up front with Bruno Beddoni.

Beddoni himself has been in threatening form in recent weeks. He is currently running equal third in the League goal-scoring stakes with eight goals, and could increase his position significantly if A.P.I.A. can't control him.

A weeks rest after their game last Saturday night with Rockdale City Suns was postponed will surely freshen the Saints up, and ensure that they start overwhelming favourites in what looms as a mini-Grand Final for A.P.I.A.'s top five chances.

A.P.I.A. are the only side to beat St George this year but it would take a minor miracle to see them trouble the league leaders at this point in the season.

Bonnyrigg White Eagles VS Sydney Crescent Star

Saturday 6th March at Serbian Centre
Kick-Off 7.00pm First Grade / 5.00pm Grade 20

A tricky one, this match at Lidcombe Oval. Sydney Crescent Star have been doing fairly well at home, but apart from early season wins at A.P.I.A. and Central Coast their travelling form has been a lot less impressive.

This could be a tough assignment for them after Bonnyrigg's more assured performances in recent weeks.

The White Eagles do appear to have clicked at last, with new coach Gordon Brown settling things down nicely.

He did not disrupt the side that faced A.P.I.A. by being tempted to bring in new signing Brad Groves. Groves came on late off the bench, but it seems likely Brown will stick with the starting eleven he used at Lambert Park in an attempt to make it three in a row, and a chance at the top five.

Aaron Burgess and Jimmy Aschner seem to be combining well up front and the rest of the midfield is also going along nicely now.

Whether there is room for Fred Umlil is debatable, as the team has now won twice without the gifted star, who was serving a two-match suspension.

The captaincy of Shane Knight and his new found defensive responsibilities appears to be a key factor in the side's revival. Knight did look the best Bonnyrigg player on the park last weekend, as well as the most committed.

As for Crescent Star, they do not have the same talent to call upon as the home side. It could and should be a very open game and it could so easily be another goalfest at the Serbian Centre on Saturday night.

Central Coast United VS Blacktown City Demons

Saturday 6th March at Pluim Park
Kick-Off 7.00pm First Grade / 5.00pm Grade 20

Blacktown will almost certainly parade two new signings who were due to make their debuts in the midweek Continental Tyres Cup game, Adam Kwasnik and Mark Milligan.

Kwasnik made his presence felt in his last two NSL games with the winning goals for Northern Spirit both times.

Fresh from their latest win over Parramatta, and with Kain Rastall back in the side after suspension, the Demons would start favourites to down United and avenge a first round one-nil defeat at The Gabbie.

The Central Coast side is still improving though, and making life hard for opponents. Blacktown will definitely need to be on their game to repel them on Saturday night.

It hardly seems a long time since the Coast side defeated the Demons at the Gabbie but both sides have undergone much improvement since then and the locals will be primed by United coach Jim Foley to get another good home win under their belts after a very slow start to the season at the Mingara Centre.

There was a lot to like about the Coast United's performance at Lidcombe Oval last Sunday and they are showing a lot of resilience.

The front runners are firing and a top five spot is certainly not beyond the FC boys.

Brian Brown's main issue will be whether to field some of his new players or not. He had planned to blood them in the midweek Continental Tyres Cup game against Blacktown Association on Wednesday night and much would depend on whether any of the other regular players picked up knocks.

Penrith Panthers VS Belconnen Blue Devils

Saturday 6th March at Cook Park (St Marys)
Kick-Off 7.00pm First Grade / 5.00pm Grade 20

Penrith coach Tony Rasmussen described the Panthers performance against Bankstown City last weekend as "poor" as they succumbed meekly to a 4-1 shellacking.

If it was not for the efforts of goalkeeper Chad Taylor, the damage would have been worse, the loss leaving the club on a knife edge in fifth spot.

"It was one of the poorest games we have played in months. We just didn't turn up to play tonight," he said after the match.

Rasmussen was quick to note that star midfielder Peter Bennett, who came on at half-time against the Lions, will start this week against Belconnen as he looks to try and kick-start his team again after a tough loss.

"We got touched up by Belconnen in the first round 2-0 in Canberra and we will be looking to redeem ourselves," Rasmussen said, "if we are to be a genuine top five side we need to be competitive in these sorts of games and I'll be looking for a significant improvement on the way we played against Bankstown."

Belconnen, however, are looking anything but weak. Holding a firm second place on the League ladder, and with Daniel Macor still on fire they may be hard to beat.

They gave Canterbury a good touch-up last weekend to bounce back from a tough 3-2 loss against the league leaders St. George in Batemans Bay.

Their away form has been excellent this year with three wins and two draws from seven matches and aside from Macor they'll be looking to in-form striker Ilija Prenzoski to lead the way against a fired-up home side.

In round three when these two sides met, the result was a comprehensive 2-0 win to Belconnen at McKellar.

Canterbury-Marrickville VS Rockdale City Suns

Sunday 7th March at Henson Park
Kick-Off 5.00pm First Grade / 3.00pm Grade 20

The soap opera that is Canterbury-Marrickville continues with coach John Sentas shown the door after just six games in charge of the beleaguered club.

Despite some encouraging performances his return of one win from six starts was deemed insufficient and following their 4-1 loss to Belconnen he was informed of the decision with goal-keeper Bob Catlin appointed as caretaker coach.

For a club in complete disarray it would be hard to see them stay competitive and focused for the visit of Rockdale, one of the sides considered to be genuine championship material.

Having enjoyed last weekend off to recover from their 5-1 defeat by Bonnyrigg, the Suns will have new faces Zenon Caravella and Ante Juric from Sydney Olympic on hand, start most likely in midfield and defence respectively. The concerning factor for both clubs is their lack of goal scoring in recent weeks, the Suns managing just four goals in their last four games with the Berries having scored the lowest of any side this season, just fourteen.

One man who is in form is Steve Karavatakis and the former Sun will be Canterbury's ace this week. Kara has scored four times in their last five matches and is starting to return to the match winning form that has seen him establish himself as one of the best strikers in the league. The club has also signed his good friend George Souris and he'll be rushed straight into the team at centre back for this week's game.

In round three when these two sides first met, they played out a hard fought one-all draw. So they will be both keen to prove they're the better team this time.

Parramatta Eagles VS Bankstown City Lions

Sunday 7th March at Bankstown City Lions
Kick-Off 6.00pm First Grade / 4.00pm Grade 20

A one-all draw was the outcome when these sides met in the first series of games and it could be just as tight the second time around too.

While Bankstown have been among the goals of late and have recruited well to emerge now as a semi-final contender, Parramatta will, no doubt, still entertain similar ideas of their own.

Coach Trevor Morgan's task has been to find a combination that can do the job week in and week out. Until quite recently it appeared to be doing just that.

At The Gabbie they had little luck in front of goal and paid the price, as the Demons came back at them fast down the flanks and exposed them badly.

Changes made by Morgan at half-time shored things up noticeably in the second-half and if the team that takes the field resembles the one that finished off the game against Blacktown then the Eagles definitely have a good chance of bouncing back to form after an unexpected lean spell.

In Matt Borg and Sean Babic the Lions have a pretty lethal strike force and both players are averaging a goal a game now.

With the Lions' midfield strengthened by the inclusion of George Nohra and the addition of a former Sydney Olympic and Sydney United dynamo, things do look good for another away win by Andy Papoulias and his men.

Apart from their midweek Cup game at Liverpool Bossy's Ernie Smith Reserve Bankstown planned a game against Parramatta Power at Jensen Park on Tuesday at seven pm.

As always a difficult game to call.

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Continental
TYRES - ENGINEERED IN GERMANY

Minatours vs Dolphins

By Paul Goodwin

Hurstville has caused a boil over and sunk the Dolphins at Cromer Park inthe deferred Round Two game from the Sunday afternoon.

The rain continued to fall on the Peninsular, but the mighty Minotaurs continued to respond to the General's urgings and recorded a solid 2-0 victory.

They may have been robbed of any home advantage and a home gate at theweekend - by scrub fires around the Rockdale complex - and they also had to make one of the longest trips midweek, but apparently that only made them more determined.

Goals in the 3rd and 5th minutes by Dimitri Zakilis were enough to see them through to the next round where they will face the Sutherland Sharks.

Manly could not bridge the gap and bowed out on home turf. Turf that was reduced to a quagmire at the finish and the newly built grandstand, uncovered as it is, could offer no protection from the elements on a filthy night which felt more like June than February to the brave spectators who ventured outdoors.

Most of the hardy fans that did decide to go had to huddle under the more basic shelter of the amenities block behind the goal, long the refuge of supporters at Cromer Park.

A delighted Hurstville coach, Peter Sarikakis, explained after the game that, "we may be the poorest team in the competition, financially, and we know it's going to be a long, long season, but whenever the boys pull on the black and white shirt of the Minotaurs they lift and it happened for sure tonight."

Led by long-time skipper Sam Panagakis and with a team of youngsters Hurstville never looked like being headed once they hit the lead.

Paul Paras had a great game in the midfield, setting up one of the goals and was a constant menace to the Dolphins' defence, utility man Modar Sultan was very strong and new keeper, teenager George Bouropoulos, maintained the tradition of good custodians who have donned the famous stripes of the club.

Chris Demitriou was also a tower of strength in the middle of park in what was described as "an all round good team performance by a bunch of kids", by the General.

The Continental Tyres Cup produced yet another upset and showed, once again, that it is not the glamour that counts, but the commitment.

2004 CONTINENTAL TYRES CUP - ROUND THREE PREVIEW

The results are in from Round 3, it's time for the unseeded teams to face the seeded teams in Round 3 of the 2004 Continental Tyres Cup on Wednesday the 3rd of March, 2004.

The final team in the third round was decided when the Hurstville City Minotaurs defeated the Manly Warringah Dolphins 2-0 in very wet conditions at Cromer Park.

As is the luck of the draw, there are some classic match-ups in this next knock-out stage of the competition. The first of which sees the top seed, the Blacktown City Demons (NSW Premier League), facing off with local namesakes, the Blacktown Association (State League Division Two) at the Gabbie Stadium. These two sides have never met in a competition or friendly fixture and this historic match will definitely create much interest from the local soccer fraternity.

At the other end of the spectrum, Hakoah will face Canterbury Marrickville Olympic. These two clubs were the powerhouse clubs of the 1960's, 70's, 80's meeting on many occasions in the NSW first division and later for a year in the National Soccer League with national representatives players such as Johnny Warren, Jon Watkiss, Joe Watson, Alan Marnock and Ray Baartz gracing the field.

These clubs have not met in formal competition since 1986 when Canterbury-Marrickville played Sydney City (formerly Hakoah) in the Northern Conference of the National Soccer League. Sydney City was victorious on that last occasion with current Socceroo's coach Frank Farina scoring 2 goals, in the 4-1 score-line.

The Gabbie: Home ground to Blacktown City Demons, and where they will face Blacktown Association, their local namesake, for a 'historic' match on Wednesday 3 March

Other "Local Derby" fixtures include the Penrith Panthers (NSW Premier League) meeting Schofields Scorpions (State League Division Two) at Cook Park, Greystanes (State League Division Two) up against the Parramatta Eagles (NSW Premier League) and Hurstville ZSC (Winter Super League) taking on Bonnyrigg White Eagles (NSW Premier League) at the Serbian Centre.

At this stage there are still two Association-based clubs left in the competition with North Sydney (Ku-Ring-Gai District Soccer Association) locking horns Fairfield Bulls (Winter Super League) and the Lidcombe Waratahs (Granville & Districts Soccer Association) looking to slay the Fraser Park Dragons (Winter Super League).

MSC Liverpool (Winter Super League) have the unenviable task of travelling down to Canberra midweek to face the in-form Belconnen Blue Devils (NSW Premier League) at the McKellar Soccer Centre, whilst the students from Sydney University (Winter Super League) face an improving Central Coast United (NSW Premier League).

The Macarthur Rams (Winter Super League) will have a tough assignment when they meet the current NSW Premier League leaders, the St George Saints, at St George Stadium.

Round 3 Fixtures

Date	Home Team	Away Team	Venue	Time
03-03-04	Blacktown City Demons	Blacktown Association	Gabbie Stadium	19:30
03-03-04	Hajduk Wanderers United	Northern Tigers	Hajduk Stadium	19:30
03-03-04	Fairfield Bulls	North Sydney	Ninevah Field	20:00
03-03-04	Penrith Panthers	Schofields Scorpions	Cook Park (St Marys)	19:30
03-03-04	Greystanes	Parramatta Eagles	Melita Stadium	19:30
03-03-04	Sydney Crescent Star	Belmore Hercules	Lidcombe Oval	19:30
03-03-04	St George Saints	Macarthur Rams	St George Stadium	19:30
03-03-04	Belconnen Blue Devils	M.S.C. Liverpool	McKellar SC	20:00
03-03-04	Bonnyrigg White Eagles	Hurstville ZSC	Serbian Centre	19:30
03-03-04	Liverpool Bossy	Bankstown City Lions	Ernie Smith Res	19:30
03-03-04	Lidcombe Waratahs	Fraser Park Dragons	Garside Park	19:30
03-03-04	Fairfield City Lions	Rockdale City Suns	Popondetta Park	19:30
02-03-04	Hakoah	Canterbury Marrickville	Henson Park	19:30
03-03-04	Sydney University	Central Coast United	Cromer Park	19:30
03-03-04	Hurstville City Minotaurs	Sutherland Sharks	Jensen Park	19:30
03-03-04	Earlwood Wanderers	A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers	Lambert Park	19:30

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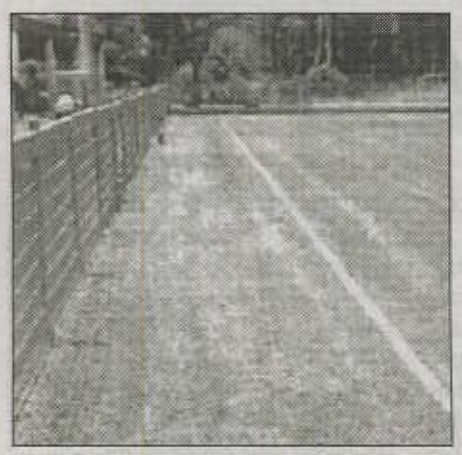
FROM THE SIDELINES

WITH GREG STOCK



Transfers

It has been an exceptionally tough week for Competition Secretary Greg McGriskin and his hard-working crew, who have been up till the wee small hours processing a vast array of transfers.

With the Premier League transfer window now closed a number of teams have used the opportunity to strengthen their playing roster with a tough schedule of League and Cup games to be played over the next three months.

The highest profile signing is by league leaders St George, who have snared Wollongong City striker Stuart Young, beating off a number of other teams to obtain his services.

Over at Bonnyrigg coach Gordon Brown will welcome the additions of Northern Spirit duo Vuko Tomasevic and Bradley Groves to his roster. A former fan favourite at the club, Tomasevic is expected to bolster the left side midfield and provide the drive and inspiration to a team that is now starting to look capable of winning some games.

Former Blacktown and Sydney Olympic midfielder Jimmy Nikas is the new face at Lambert Park with A.P.I.A. coach Les DeCelis desperate to stop a run of four straight losses. Mark Milligan and Adam Kwasnik from Northern Spirit have found their way to Gabbie Stadium while big George Souris and John Tsironis from Northern Spirit join caretaker coach Bob Catlin at Canterbury.

Rockdale may had their match with St George postponed over the weekend, but coach Ivan Petkovic was busy during the week stitching up a deal which brings Zenon Caravella and Ante Juric to the club. Even the Parramatta Eagles have gotten into the transfer frenzy signing Richie Cardozo from Sydney Olympic, while Bankstown City have Anthony Doumanis from Sydney United to round out a very tough team.

John Sentas was relieved of his dutles over the weekend. Goal-keeper Bob Caitlin will take over in the interim

If you think that's not enough, just wait till you see what happens in the Winter Super League season, which kicks off this weekend.

Sentas bows out

Canterbury-Marrickville continues its woes with coach John Sentas being replaced after the Berries 4-1 loss to Belconnen on Saturday night. Goal-keeper Bob Catlin will do the honours with Spiro Hantzis his assistant until a replacement is named in the next week.

The familiar face of John Xipolitas is one name being mentioned as a possible replacement.

Bankstown powers through

Bankstown City have a very busy week with two games on Tuesday and Wednesday.

On Tuesday they'll be playing Parramatta Power under lights at Jensen Park, 7.30pm kick-off, while on Wednesday they'll be at Ernie Smith Reserve playing Liverpool Bossy in the third round of the Continental Tyres Cup.

WINTER SUPER LEAGUE 2004

With the Premier League moving quickly towards the business end of the season, the Winter Super League kicks off with round one matches scheduled to kick off Saturday and Sunday.

The fourteen team competition looks set to be the most competitive season, since it's revamp in season 2001 with a number of profile players from the National League expected to fill the rosters of many teams.

After coming ever so close to winning a Championship/Premiership double, Fraser Park will again be the side to beat after their arch-nemesis Sydney Crescent Star was promoted to the Premier League. Last years Coach of the Year Ian Gillan has returned for his second season in charge and is looking forward to their first hit-out on Sunday at home to MSC Liverpool. "I have no doubts that this season is going to be more competitive than last," said Gillan.

"Already we have seen a number of clubs dip into the transfer market to recruit some high quality players which is sure to raise the quality and profile of the competition."

As one of the more ambitious clubs in the league, the Dragons will again play four homes game at Kogarah Jubilee Oval in a bid to open themselves up to the rugby league fan base of their namesake. After drawing some healthy crowds for their matches last season, the club is hoping that they can again challenge for the top five and build on a strong level of support from their loyal army of fans. "We have tried to be financially prudent in terms of player recruitment," Gillan said.

"We aren't paying players the big bucks that everyone assumes we are, but trying to develop a good club environment where we can give talented youngsters an opportunity to play first grade."

Of the new signings Jason Holmes, Glenn Sprod, Michael Kladis, Terry Palapanis and Zia Younan will add some zest to the Dragons and they'll start the seasons as overwhelming favourites.

Their main contenders for the championship expected to come from a group of clubs, which includes Manly-Warringah Dolphins, Fairfield Bulls and the new merged entity Hajduk Wanderers United.

Manly, under coach Phil Moss, had a disappointing 2003, but if their tough preseason training regime is anything to go by, they should be highly competitive.

Despite losing Craig Sharpley to retirement, Moss has picked up Scott Wells and last season's Silver Medallist Robbie Portelli and through their close affiliation with Northern Spirit, are expecting a few youngsters from their ranks to make their presence felt at Cromer Park.

Steve Berry and Damian Rosenthal are also returning while Moss himself is looking trim, taut and terrific and expected to occupy the sweepers role.

"We are quietly confident we can improve on our results last year and challenge for a top five spot," he said.

Under coach Hugh McCrory Fairfield face their first Winter Super League campaign after being relegated from the Premier League last year. Starting almost from scratch McCrory has recruited a number of quality players well known in state league circles as he attempts to take the Bulls straight back to top-flight football.

Down the road at Hajduk — the new entity club which is a merger between AC United and Hajduk Wanderers — is also gathering pace. Under coach Bruce Tilt, they have retained the vast majority of last seasons team, which made it all the way to the preliminary final, and are expected to finish inside the top five by season's end.

Fans of the club will be treated to some revamped facilities at Hajduk Stadium which includes a new lighting system and a first class pitch which had thousands of dollars spent on its upgrade during the off-season.

As two of the more traditional rivals in the league Dulwich Hill and Stanmore Hawks are also building nicely, this year there is a whisper or two around that both the teams could be the big improvers. Dulwich Hill under-coach Jim Patikas may have struggled for results during the trial games but come Saturday night, they will be red-hot favourites to knock over Macarthur at Lynwood Park.

Of the new signings, John Theodoropoulos, John Pieris and Andrew Falas are the three exciting youngsters to keep an eye out for, while Patikas welcomes back the highly experienced Jose Mendes for another season after a stint with Sydney Olympic.

Stanmore, who also share Arlington Oval as a home ground, have Sotiti Mavros in charge for 2004 and are basing their team largely around some talented youngsters from last year.

Having lost Anthony Sarmonikas and Chris Hunt to Sutherland and John Theodoropoulos and John Pieris to Dulwich Hill, they are rumoured to have dipped into the transfer market and could have a few big names don their shirt on Sunday for the clash with the Minotaurs.

Con Anastasiadis in goals and sweeper George Zabetakis are expected to provide the experience this young side needs to steer it in the right direction.

Down at Seymour Shaw Park, Vic Ellul has returned and assembled a solid unit capable of sneaking a top five spot. Having lost a number of his squad to the Premier League Ellul has picked up Bradley Campbell, Bryan Raeburn, Anthony Sarmonikas, Chris Hunt and Luke Tomich as his major signings and combined with the likes of Adam Mamolitti, Matty Dihm and Iain MacDonald they should win plenty of matches.

For the League's two newcomers, Hurstville ZSC and Northern Tigers, this season is shaping up as one of their toughest tests. Hurstville coach John Gagro has built his team around the successful nucleus of last years team and with a number of profile National League players expected to join during the first few rounds there is a lot to like.

Luke Glavas is returning and the rumour-mill suggests that the Alilovic brothers Ante and Denis may also return along with Richard Plesa once their commitments in the Premier League have finished.

Northern Tigers won't have the same luxury as Hurstville, but coach Fred Mesiti still has a talented squad at his disposal. Matthew Hunter is expected to rejoin the club from Northern Spirit while last season's top scorer Ben Jenke is also expected back from A.P.I.A.-Leichhardt.

Hurstville City Minotaurs under coach Peter Sarikakis may not have a number of their more experienced heads, but with this team expect the unexpected.

Peter Papoythis and Tom Pontidas may have moved on but George Kalogeras and Sam Panagakis are still there as is striker Dimitri Zakilas and they have enough ability to be a threat.

Ryde City has a new coach in Jim Hart and is looking to their junior ranks to provide enough talent for the season ahead. Steve Baveas and one or two other Northern Spirit youngsters are likely to be included to strengthen the squad but it could well be a long season for them.

Macarthur Rams with Washington Gonzalez in charge are also looking to a youth policy as they seek to unearth a competitive squad. Having finished bottom in 2004, anything would be a bonus to a club that has struggled to look anything like the side that finished fifth in 2002.

That leaves just Sydney University and MSC Liverpool as the leagues two smokies, both of whom could cause a few surprises. Now in his second stint at Liverpool, Paul Carter has high hopes for his team of youngsters with veteran Eric Williams expected to provide the firepower up front.

The same goes for Stewart Porter at Sydney University, who will look to club stalwart Rob Smithies to provide the goals and a hardworking midfield headed by Daisuke Nakayame to create the opportunities.

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KYLE PATTERSON JOINS SOCCER NSW TEAM

Soccer NSW president, Tom A. Doumanis, announced yesterday that award winning soccer journalist Kyle Patterson will join Soccer NSW as Media and Communications Manager from Monday the 8th of March, 2004.

"We are very excited that Kyle has accepted the position with the biggest soccer body in the country," said Mr Doumanis, and we have a great success story to tell.

"Having such a well-known and respected professional as Kyle driving our media and communications effort means our message and our many exciting plans for the game will be heard far and wide.

"Kyle's experience and skills will definitely boost the public profile of the organization.

Current Soccer NSW Corporate Communications, Media and Marketing Manager, Adam Mark, will assume the newly created role of Marketing and Sponsorship Manager.

In a statement release on Monday SBS Television head of sport, Les Murray, announced the departure from the broadcaster of the award-winning sports presenter and journalist, Patterson.

We're extremely sorry to see Kyle leave SBS," said Murray, "his talents as a hige quality journalist and broadcaster have been at the core of SBS' broad strengths as a soccer broadcaster.

New Soccer NSW Media and Communication Manager, Kyle Patterson

"In this day and age, when soccer administrators have begun to finally employ quality executives, it is flattering to SBS, and to Kyle, that they shoulkd take one of ours. We wish Kyle the very best."

Patterson, who co-hosted SBS, acclaimed the World Cup coverage in 2002, resigned after 18 years to take up the position of Media and Communications Manager at Soccer NSW.

Kyle Patterson said he thanked SBS and his long-time boss Les Murray for the chance of "a fantastic sportying odyssey."

"I've travelled the globe covering three World Cups, two European Championships and followed the Socceroos from Tehran to Buenos Aires and all points in between," said Patterson.

"Working at SBS is more about a mission that just a job, and now I'm taking that sense of mission to Soccer NSW. I'm very excited about his opprtunity."

Patterson has presented and reported on many sports for SBS. In 2003, Patterson won the Australian Sports Commission's top media award for 'Best Reporting of an Issue in Australian Sport', for his extensive coverage of Australian soccer's Crawford reform process.

2004 Soccer Season Kicks off

SOCCER NSW

This weekend (March 6-7) the 2004 Winter Super League, State League Division One, Premier Youth League, Super Youth League, Division One Youth League and Girl's Youth League begins.

For the latest results and information, check out: www.soccernsw.com.au/comps

Legends and Old Boys rise from their graves to fight it out one more time

The Blacktown City Legends were out for revenge against The Parramatta Old Boys last Saturday at the Gabbie Stadium having conceded a very late equaliser in the fixture last year.

Played as a curtain-raiser to the First Grade game between the same sides, the crowd was provided with first class entertainment from the many NSL stars of yester-year.

City took the honours 2-1, both their goals coming from current Northern Spirit coach and former Blacktown favourite, Lawrie McKinna.

Jason Falzon hit Parramatta's solitary goal but the result was almost secondary, the main treat being able to see the likes of Barry Hoare, Robbie Wheatley, Peter Denyer, Stuart (Smurf) Selvage, John Larkin, John Bradley, Neil Taylor, Tony Rassmussen (Blacktown) and Alec McPherson, Peter Hensman, Kenny Wilson, John McKie, Alex Jamieson (Parramatta), all playing on the Gabbie after such a long time.

You can be sure that the reminiscing after the game went on long into the night.

Blacktown City Legends: Barry Hoare, Cliff Pointer, Peter Denyer, Stuart Selvage, Andrew Brockbank, John Larkin, Craig Mason, Randell Easthorpe, John Bradley, David Fitzharris, Mick McLaughlin, Neil Taylor, Lawrie McKinna, Robbie Wheatley, Rod Skellern, Tony Rassmussen, Norm Boardman, Mike Quarmby

Parramatta Eagles Old Boys: Alec McPherson, Derek Laing, Phil Mikas, Rob McGinn, Steve McDonald, Jason Falzon, Peter Hensman, Bobby Smith, Kenny Wilson, Tommy Gavin, John McKie, Paul Watkins, Alex Jamieson, Bobby Macpherson, Mike Berry, Brian Parker, Terry Jones, Vernon Darvall, Billy Griffiths

Coaches: Ken Schembri and Casey De Bruin.

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ITALIAN SERIE A

ITALIAN AFFAIR

By Joe Russo

He was known in Italy as the 'gigante buono' (gentle giant) and last week, after series of illnesses, he passed away aged 72. He was John Charles, the Welsh international who played for Juventus, Roma and Leeds Utd.

Charles played in Italy in the late 1950's and early 1960's and it is at Juventus that he will be best remembered.

It was the then Juventus President, Umberto Agnelli, who paid approximately $A100,000 to Leeds Utd to obtain the services of Charles. In those days it was an astronomical amount.

However, Juventus were never to regret that money spent on Charles because he became the leading goalscorer in the Serie A in his first season – 1957/58 – and at the same time Juventus won the League title (Scudetto).

His teammates that year were the great Omar Sivori, the Argentinian who represented Italy with distinction, and Giampiero Boniperti, who is today Honorary President of Juventus after years of running the club.

Charles played five consecutive seasons at Juventus having worn the famous club's shirt on 178 occasions and having scored 105 goals for the club.

The son of a Welsh miner, he was soon noticed by the talent scouts at Leeds Utd who signed him at the tender age of 16. He went on to play for ten years for Leeds, scoring over 300 goals for the club, before his move to Juventus. During his time at Juve the club won three Scudettos and two Italian Cups.

His earned his nickname soon after arriving in Turin because it was blatantly clear he was something special – he never even received a yellow card in his career yet alone a red one. A record that not too many players could ever boast about.

He never complained about the number of fouls he received as a striker and was always first on the scene if an opposing player was down injured.

In 1962 he returned to Leeds Utd but only for a season. In 1963 he returned to Italy but this time he joined Roma and once again it was only for a season.

He returned to the UK after that and kept on playing until he was 40 in 1971 but mainly for more minor teams, such as Cardiff City and Hilford United.

Charles represented Wales on 37 occasions and scored 15 goals and in 1959 he finished third in the Golden Ball award – that year it was won by the legendary Alfredo Di Stefano.

He was a much a loved person and even in his latter years, when he was fairly sick and his treatment was rather costly, Boniperti, his old friend, was there to help him.

In January this year he was due to appear on Italian television on a popular sports show but, unfortunately, he was rushed to Milan hospital for an emergency operation. Just two weeks ago he then returned to England, with his wife and two of Juventus's club doctors, on board the private jet of the famous club.

Charles loved Italy and Italy loved him. He will always have a special place in the history of Italian football and in particular at Juventus.

Vale John Charles.

★ ★ ★ ★

The Stadio Olimpico in Rome will be jointly run by Roma and Lazio, the most bitter of city rivals who have been renting the ground for years from the Italian Olympic Association.

A derby in Rome is something special and the Olimpico is a venue that really comes alive for these occasions. Roma claims about 60% of the support from the city while Lazio have the rest.

The ground will not be sold to the clubs but they will decide how the ground is to be used along with the array of sporting facilities in the area surrounding the ground known as the Foro Italico.

Both Franco Sensi and Ugo Longo, respective presidents of Roma and Lazio, were present at the announcement. However, it would appear to be the only good news for either club in recent time.

Roma, who are in financial trouble and could be sold to a Russian oil magnate, have had their shares suspended from trading on the Italian Stock Exchange because of their unpaid debts.

Lazio on the other hand have their former president, Sergio Cragnotti, sitting in jail as he awaits the outcome of an investigation into the bankruptcy of his company, and former major sponsor of Lazio, Cirio.

★ ★ ★ ★

ASW readers can tune into 98.5 FM on Sunday nights at 10.00pm for all the latest soccer news locally and abroad with myself, Joseph Carlucci, Mark Stavroulakis and Stuart Jones.

LAZIO 0
MILAN 1

Midfielder Massimo Ambrosini's goal gave AC Milan a 1-0 win over Lazio to preserve their five-point cushion at the top of Serie A.

Milan, smarting from a 4-0 Italian Cup loss to Lazio in Rome earlier this month, nearly took a 17th-minute lead when Brazilian Cafu fired narrowly wide.

The home side grew in confidence as the first half progressed with Claudio Lopez coming closest to opening the scoring when he narrowly missed connecting with a superb cross from Stefano Fiore.

Lazio continued to press after the interval, but failed to break down Milan's solid defence.

The game seemed to be heading for a draw before a lapse by Lazio's defence allowed midfielder Ambrosini enough space to head Clarence Seedorf's cross past keeper Angelo Peruzzi in the 75th minute.

INTER MILAN 1
BRESCIA 3

Brescia pulled off a shock 3-1 win against Inter Milan at the San Siro sending Alberto Zaccheroni's side to their third straight league defeat.

Three minutes after the break recent signing Dejan Stankovic put Inter ahead with a close-range effort but in the 67th minute youngster Andrea Caracciolo equalised by lobbing goalkeeper Francesco Toldo after a fine run by Simone Del Nero.

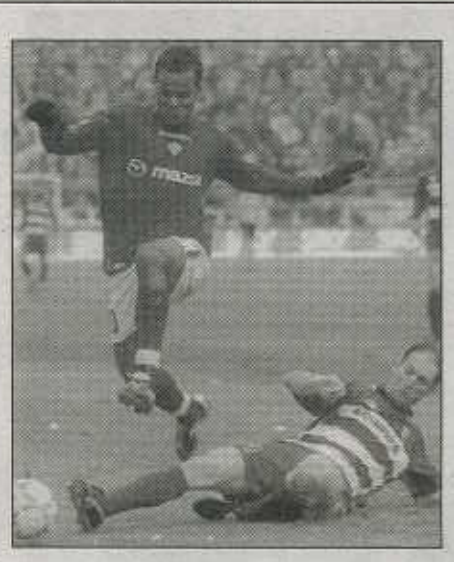
Inter's forwards missed several chances before Del Nero gave Brescia a surprise lead when he nodded home after 73 minutes before Caracciolo sealed the points with a deflected header nine minutes from time.

Stankovic was sent off for a terrible challenge on Del Nero four minutes from time.

JUVENTUS 3
ANCONA 0

Three first half goals from Mauro Camoranesi, Fabrizio Miccoli and Alessandro Del Piero helped Juventus beat bottom club Ancona and keep up with the title chasers.

Juve took the lead after seven minutes through Camoranesi's well-taken volley from the edge of the box. In the 41st minute diminutive striker Miccoli slotted home from close range after a fine run by Marco Di Vaio. A minute into stoppage time Del Piero got the third with a low angled drive from just inside the box.



Action from the Parma-AS Roma match

PARMA 1
ROMA 4

Roma kept their titles hopes alive with an impressive come from behind 4-1 win over Parma.

After falling behind to Alberto Gilardino's 30th-minute volley, Roma regrouped and showed their class on the stroke of halftime with an equaliser from Antonio Cassano, who was nicely fed by Francesco Totti.

After the restart Roma held Parma in check and took the lead after a fine one-two between Frenchman Olivier Dacourt and Emerson that saw the Brazilian finish the move from close range.

After 70 minutes, Roma captain Totti made it 3-1 with a trademark low angled free-kick before Mancini slotted home a deflected Lima blast six minutes later to make it four.

LECCE 1
MODENA 0

Lecce won for the fourth time in five league matches to continue their impressive climb out of the relegation zone.

A first half Ernesto Chevanton penalty on 23 minutes was enough as the southern side held on for another precious victory, this time leapfrogging fellow strugglers Modena.

Lecce moved on to 25 points, level with Bologna, while Modena remained sixth from bottom on 23 points.

PERUGIA 4
BOLOGNA 2

Perugia won their second match in a row with an impressive 4-2 drubbing of Bologna.

Native Umbrian Fabrizio Ravanelli gave Perugia a first half lead with a 32nd minute free kick.

Just after the hour mark Claudio Bellucci's close-range effort levelled the scores but seven minutes later defender Paul Codrea's deflected shot restored the lead for Perugia.

After 74 minutes Bologna's Samuele Dalla Bona was sent off for a foul in the box and Ze Maria converted the resulting penalty to make it 3-1. Eight minutes later Salvatore Fresi slotted home another spot kick before Bellucci got his second for the visitors four minutes from time.

SAMPDORIA 1
CHIEVO 0

A goal five minutes into the second half from defender Aimo Diana gave Sampdoria a hard-fought victory over Chievo Verona.

Sampdoria attacked form the start and should have taken the lead on 22 minutes but Cristiano Doni saw his poorly taken penalty turned away by veteran goalkeeper Luca Marchegiani.

After Diana's close range finish put Sampdoria ahead, Chievo poured forward and would have equalised were it not for several miraculous saves from Francesco Antonioli.

SIENA 0
REGGINA 0

Siena and Reggina remain deep in relegation trouble after a goalless draw that is of little use to either side.

The Tuscans - level on points with Reggina in the relegation zone - attacked for much of the game but, despite the return of talismanic Brazilian winger Rodrigo Taddei from injury, they could not find the all-important breakthrough that would have given them three critical points.

Siena forward Tore Andre Flo went closest to breaking the deadlock as he struck a post, but both sides had to settle for a point.

EMPOLI 2
UDINESE 0

Lowly Empoli got first-half goals from Antonio Busce and Emilson Cribari to stun Udinese 2-0 and revive its hopes of escaping relegation.

The first goal arrived in the 22nd minute when Busce outjumped Udinese's defence to head a corner home.

And Cribari diverted a free-kick into the net four minutes before the interval to seal the victory.

Empoli's fifth victory this season lifted it to 20 points, two short of Siena, Reggina and Lecce, the teams immediately above the relegation zone in Serie A.

Totti Goal - The AS Roma star scored in his side's four-one win over Parma.

FIXTURES

Sunday 7th March

Chievo	vs	Empoli
Roma	vs	Inter
Brescia	vs	Juventus
Bologna	vs	Lazio
Modena	vs	Parma
Udinese	vs	Perugia
Ancona	vs	Reggina
Milan	vs	Sampdoria
Lecce	vs	Siena

SERIE B

Albinoleffe 3 Bari 1, Ascoli 1 Napoli 1, Avellino 1 Venezia 0, Cagliari 5 Atalanta 1, Como 2 Treviso 1, Genoa 4 Ternana 1, Messina 3 Catania 0, Palermo 2 Torino 1, Piacenza 2 Fiorentina 0, Salernitana 0 Livorno 1, Triestina 2 Pescara 1, Verona 2 Vicenza 3.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Atalanta	29	13	13	3	39	23	52
Cagliari	29	13	9	7	51	32	48
Palermo	29	12	12	5	40	26	48
Ternana	29	13	9	7	41	31	48
Piacenza	29	13	9	7	31	24	48
Messina	29	11	12	6	39	29	45
Livorno	29	10	14	5	36	27	44
Triestina	29	10	11	8	39	38	41
Torino	29	10	10	9	39	33	40
Catania	29	10	9	10	35	31	39
Salernitana	29	10	8	11	26	30	38
Fiorentina	29	8	13	8	33	38	37
Vicenza	29	8	12	9	30	30	36
Treviso	29	8	12	9	29	30	36
Ascoli	29	8	11	10	34	36	35
Verona	29	8	11	10	37	39	35
Napoli	29	6	17	6	22	28	35
Albinoleffe	29	9	8	12	27	38	35
Pescara	29	8	10	11	24	34	34
Venezia	29	6	12	11	23	31	30
Genoa	29	6	12	11	27	37	30
Como	29	7	9	13	23	34	30
Bari	29	6	9	14	30	41	27
Avellino	29	3	12	14	25	40	21

SERIE A

Siena 0 Reggina 0, Empoli 2 Udinese 0, Inter Milan 1 Brescia 3, Juventus 3 Ancona 0, Lecce 1 Modena 0, Parma 1 Roma 4, Perugia 4 Bologna 2, Sampdoria 1 Chievo Verona 0, Lazio 0 AC Milan 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Milan	23	18	4	1	44	13	58
2 Roma	23	16	5	2	51	10	53
3 Juventus	23	16	4	3	47	25	52
4 Lazio	23	12	4	7	33	23	40
5 Parma	23	11	6	6	33	30	39
6 Inter Milan	23	10	6	7	39	23	36
7 Udinese	23	10	6	7	28	25	36
8 Sampdoria	23	8	9	6	28	26	33
9 Chievo	23	8	5	10	25	27	29
10 Brescia	23	6	9	8	33	36	27
11 Bologna	23	6	7	10	25	33	25
12 Lecce	23	7	4	12	28	39	25
13 Modena	23	5	8	10	18	29	23
14 Siena	23	5	7	11	28	36	22
15 Reggina	23	4	10	9	19	33	22
16 Empoli	23	5	5	13	18	39	20
17 Perugia	23	2	11	10	29	42	17
18 Ancona	23	0	6	17	8	45	6

ENGLISH

Fulham's Alain Goma (left) challenges Manchester United goalscorer Louis Saha.

ARSENAL 2
CHARLTON 1

Arsenal took another big step in their inexorable advance towards the title, charging into a two-goal lead inside three and a half minutes.

Robert Pires scored his 50th goal for Arsenal from close range after 93 seconds and Thierry Henry doubled the advantage from a pass by Patrick Vieira.

Charlton, however, were unlucky to lose. They pulled one back just before the hour when Danish midfielder Claus Jensen brilliantly curled a free kick over the wall and in off Jens Lehmann's right-hand post.

In injury time, Jonatan Johansson hit the post with an overhead kick from 20 metres.

FULHAM 1
MANCHESTER UTD .1

Louis Saha almost scored in the opening seconds of his return to London against his former club and then put United ahead in the 14th minute.

In a quick, simple move the length of the field keeper Roy Carroll's long throw went to Cristiano Ronaldo who played the ball on to Saha who charged down the middle to rifle it into the top of the net.

Sylvain Legwinski headed a corner onto the crossbar close to the half hour as Fulham shook off United's early dominance. They equalised in the 64th when Luis Boa Morte beat keeper Carroll with a low shot, leaving United nine points adrift of Arsenal.

Manchester City's Jon Macken (right) holds off Chelsea's John Terry.

MANCHESTER CITY .0
CHELSEA 1

Chelsea scored the only goal against the run of play when substitute Eidur Gudjohnsen, who came on for Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink in the 65th minute, took a pass from Frank Lampard and beat David James with eight minutes to go.

Chelsea, second on goal difference from Manchester United, had the better of the first half with James saving twice from Lampard and also stopping a header by Hernan Crespo.

Robbie Fowler missed three good chances in two minutes as City went all out in attack from the start of the second half and Carlo Cudicini saved well from Shaun Wright-Phillips, Sylvain Distin and Fowler.

BLACKBURN 1
SOUTHAMPTON 1

Kevin Phillips put Saints ahead in the fifth minute when he blasted the ball home from the middle of the box after fellow striker James Beattie had headed down Jason Dodd's cross.

Rovers manager Graeme Souness made two substitutions for the second half, bringing on Matt Jansen and Dwight Yorke up front for the ineffectual Paul Gallagher and Jonathon Douglas and the decision paid off almost immediately with Andy Cole's 52nd-minute equaliser.

EVERTON 2
ASTON VILLA 0

Everton deservedly won for the first time in 10 matches with two goals in the final 12 minutes of a mediocre match that was evenly balanced until substitute Tomasz Radzinski came on in the 66th minute for the home side.

Radzinski broke the deadlock when he headed home Wayne Rooney's cross from the right and Thomas Gravesen made sure of the points in the 84th with a low right-footed shot.

LEICESTER CITY ...0
WOLVERHAMPTON ..0

This scrappy relegation dog-fight ended in stalemate, leaving Wolves four from bottom in 18th place and Leicester a point behind in 19th.

There were some good chances but striker Paul Dickov's header for Leicester was cleared off the line by Lee Naylor and Steve Guppy hit the Wolves post. Leicester keeper Ian Walker saved brilliantly from striker Kenny Miller.

LEEDS UTD 2
LIVERPOOL 2

All four goals came before halftime in an Elland Road classic that both sides needed to win.

Former Leeds favourite Harry Kewell gave Liverpool the lead with a superb goal after 21 minutes but bottom club Leeds turned the game on its head through Eirik Bakke's tap-in and Mark Viduka's classy lob.

Milan Baros levelled for Liverpool, who are chasing a Champions League place for next season, with a powerful shot just before halftime.

Leeds goalkeeper Paul Robinson frustrated Liverpool after the break while Alan Smith headed against the woodwork for the home side.

PORTSMOUTH 1
NEWCASTLE UTD ...1

Newcastle's hopes of tightening their grip on fourth spot were undone by Lomana LuaLua's 89th minute goal for Portsmouth.

The striker, on loan to Portsmouth from Newcastle, struck with a volley to earn a point that lifted the south coast club out of the relegation zone.

Newcastle, who had Alan Shearer back in attack after he was rested for the UEFA Cup tie against Valerenga in midweek, were given the lead by Craig Bellamy in the 34th minute after good work from Kieron Dyer.

Arsenal striker Thierry Henry celebrates his goal against Charlton.

FIXTURES

Saturday 20th March

Arsenal	vs	Bolton
Aston Villa	vs	Blackburn
Chelsea	vs	Fulham
Leeds	vs	Man City
Leicester	vs	Everton
Liverpool	vs	Wolverhampton
Man Utd	vs	Tottenham
Middlesbrough	vs	Birmingham
Newcastle	vs	Charlton
Portsmouth	vs	Southampton

PREMIER LEAGUE

Arsenal 2 Charlton 1, Blackburn 1 Southampton 1, Everton 2 Aston Villa 0, Fulham 1 Manchester Utd 1, Leicester City 0 Wolverhampton 0, Manchester City 0 Chelsea 1, Leeds 2 Liverpool 2, Portsmouth 1 Newcastle 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Arsenal	**27**	**20**	**7**	**0**	**53**	**18**	**67**
Chelsea	27	18	4	5	48	21	58
Man Utd	27	18	4	5	51	25	58
Newcastle	27	10	12	5	38	28	42
Charlton	27	11	7	9	38	34	40
Liverpool	26	10	9	7	38	29	39
Aston Villa	27	10	7	10	32	32	37
Fulham	27	10	6	11	39	38	36
Birmingham	25	9	9	7	25	28	36
Tottenham	26	10	4	12	39	42	34
Bolton	26	8	10	8	32	40	34
Southampton	27	8	9	10	27	27	33
Middlesbrough	25	8	7	10	27	31	31
Everton	27	7	8	12	33	39	29
Blackburn	27	7	7	13	39	44	28
Man City	27	6	9	12	36	39	27
Portsmouth	26	6	6	14	29	40	24
Wolverhampton	27	5	9	13	24	52	24
Leicester	27	4	11	12	37	51	23
Leeds	27	5	7	15	26	53	22

FIRST DIVISION

Coventry 2 Derby 0, Crystal Palace 1 Gillingham 0, Ipswich 2 Preston 0, Millwall 2 Burnley 0, Notts Forest 2 Bradford 1, Reading 2 Sheffield Utd 1, Watford 4 Wimbledon 0, West Bromwich 0 Rotherham 1, West Ham 1 Cardiff 0, Wigan 1 Walsall 0, (Sunderland vs Norwich – Postponed, Crewe vs Stoke – Postponed).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Norwich	**32**	**18**	**9**	**5**	**50**	**27**	**63**
West Brom	33	17	9	7	46	30	60
Wigan	33	15	12	6	46	32	57
Ipswich	33	15	8	10	62	52	53
Millwall	33	14	11	8	40	31	53
West Ham	32	13	13	6	45	31	52
Sheffield Utd	33	15	7	11	48	40	52
Reading	33	15	7	11	41	43	52
Crystal Palace	34	14	8	12	53	48	50
Sunderland	30	13	9	8	38	30	48
Cardiff	33	12	10	11	53	42	46
Coventry	33	11	13	9	43	36	46
Preston	32	13	7	12	47	41	46
Stoke	32	12	8	12	44	45	44
Rotherham	33	10	11	12	39	45	41
Crewe	32	11	7	14	40	44	40
Watford	33	10	10	13	39	44	40
Burnley	33	9	11	13	45	54	38
Walsall	33	9	10	14	35	44	37
Gillingham	32	10	7	15	33	45	37
Notts Forest	33	8	11	14	40	43	35
Derby	33	8	10	15	35	54	34
Bradford	34	7	5	22	27	51	26
Wimbledon	32	5	3	24	28	65	18

SECOND DIVISION

Blackpool 0 Plymouth 1, Bournemouth 1 Oldham 0, Brentford 2 Notts County 3, Grimsby 6 Barnsley 1, Peterborough 1 Luton 2, Sheffield Wed 1 Bristol City 0, Stockport 1 Brighton 1, Wrexham 1 Rushden & Diamonds 1, Wycombe 3 Hartlepool 4, (Chesterfield vs Colchester - Postponed, Port Vale vs Swindon – Postponed, Tranmere vs QPR – Postponed).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Plymouth	**33**	**19**	**9**	**5**	**68**	**31**	**66**
Bristol City	33	18	10	5	47	24	64
QPR	32	16	11	5	56	30	59
Swindon	32	15	9	8	52	39	54
Luton	32	14	10	8	52	44	52
Port Vale	32	15	6	11	53	45	51
Brighton	33	14	8	11	47	36	50
Bournemouth	33	13	10	10	41	36	49
Barnsley	33	12	12	9	41	41	48
Wrexham	33	14	6	13	37	38	48
Hartlepool	32	12	11	9	50	41	47
Sheffield Wed	33	11	12	10	38	40	45
Rushden & D'monds	33	12	7	14	53	53	43
Tranmere	32	9	14	9	38	43	41
Colchester	31	11	8	12	32	41	41
Blackpool	32	11	7	14	38	45	40
Grimsby	33	10	9	14	43	57	39
Oldham	33	8	13	12	47	48	37
Chesterfield	32	8	10	14	31	48	34
Brentford	33	9	7	17	36	54	34
Notts County	33	8	7	18	37	56	31
Peterborough	33	6	12	15	37	47	30
Stockport	33	5	14	14	42	58	29
Wycombe	33	4	12	17	35	56	24

Spanish Primera Liga

Zinedine Zidane scored twice as Real Madrid took full advantage of Valencia's shock defeat at Espanyol to surge into an eight-point lead at the top of the Primera Liga.

With just 12 rounds of matches left to play, Madrid have one hand on the league trophy.

Luis Figo and Ronaldo were also on target in the second half as Madrid's big-name superstars lived up to their trumpeted reputations with a 4-2 win over Celta Vigo.

Title-chasing Valencia suffered a stunning 2-1 defeat in the Olympic stadium as Espanyol gave their dreams of Primera Liga survival a huge boost.

Raul Tamudo struck twice for the Catalan team with Miguel Mista scoring for faltering Valencia as the home side picked up three vital points.

Third-placed Deportivo La Coruna blew their chance to move up to second when they lost 3-2 at home to Barcelona.

Resurgent Barca have now won six games in a row and are fourth with 46 points, with Ronaldinho contributing two of their goals in a thrilling encounter.

Ronaldinho opened the scoring after 24 minutes with his first headed goal in the league.

Five minutes later, the Brazilian World Cup winner provided the service for Javier Saviola to get Barca's second before getting his 10th goal of the season three minutes after the break.

Celta Vigo's Brazilian player Edu (left) is fouled by Real Madrid's Michel Salgado.

Deportivo fought back with Walter Pandiani scoring twice, both goals coming from headers.

Spain striker Fernando Torres struck in the last minute to end Atletico Madrid's five-game winless streak and re-ignite their European ambitions with a 0-1 win at Real Mallorca.

They visitors were set for just a point against 10-man Real Mallorca before the striker produced a deft finish to snatch victory and it was as much as Torres himself deserved after a superb individual performance.

Athletic Bilbao won the clash of the UEFA Cup hopefuls with Jonan Garcia's goal on the stroke of half-time proving the difference.

The result meant a disappointing day for Villarreal's caretaker coach Francisco Garcia 'Paquito', in charge at home for the first time in what is his third spell in the post.

Osasuna kept their faint hopes of a place in next season's UEFA Cup alive after a slender 1-0 victory over lowly Murcia, who remain rooted to the foot of the Primera Liga.

Cameroon striker Pierre Webo settled the match with an opportunist goal on the half hour mark and his side also had the luxury of missing a second half penalty.

Real Sociedad's miserable run continued as relegation-threatened Albacete left San Sebastian with a crucial three points.

Raynald Denoueix's men have now collected just one point from their last four games.

They started well against Albacete but eventually succumbed to Pablo Redondo's solitary strike three minutes after the break which gave Albacete just their second away win of the season.

A solitary first-half goal by Salva Ballesta was enough to earn Malaga three points from their mid-table battle with visiting Racing Santander.

It was as much as Malaga deserved and they added to recent wins over Espanyol and Celta Vigo with a victory against a lacklustre Racing side who offered little going forward.

Real Betis and 10-man Sevilla played out a 1-1 draw in a stormy Seville derby.

Betis got off to a dream start when Alfonso put them ahead with a penalty in the second minute but Sevilla equalised with a neat strike from defender Javi Navarro and held on for a point despite having forward Antonito sent off late in the first half.

Real Zaragoza eased their relegation worries with a 2-1 win at 10-man Valladolid to leapfrog their opponents and move three points clear of the drop zone.

Argentinean striker Luciano Galletti scored a crucial winner nine minutes from time as Zaragoza made full use of their numerical advantage, which was brought about by the sending off of Galletti's compatriot Pablo Ricchetti in the 74th minute.

David Generelo gave the visitors the lead in the eighth minute, but their advantage lasted until 12 minutes before the break as Oscar Gonzalez struck for Valladolid to square the match.

FIXTURES

Sunday 7th March

Celta	vs	Espanyol
Racing	vs	R Madrid
Zaragoza	vs	Málaga
Athletic	vs	Valladolid
Sevilla	vs	Villarreal
Albacete	vs	Betis
Osasuna	vs	R Sociedad
Atlético	vs	Murcia
Barcelona	vs	Mallorca
Valencia	vs	Deportivo

Valladolid 1 Real Zaragoza 2, Real Betis 1 Sevilla 1, Espanyol 2 Valencia 1, Malaga 1 Santander 0, Mallorca 0 Atletico Madrid 1, Murcia 0 Osasuna 1, Real Sociedad 0 Albacete 1, Villarreal 0 Athletic Bilbao 1, Real Madrid 4 Celta Vigo 2, Deportivo 2 Barcelona 3.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 **Real Madrid**	**26**	**18**	**5**	**3**	**54**	**29**	**59**
2 Valencia	26	15	6	5	47	20	51
3 Deportivo	26	15	5	6	43	20	50
4 Barcelona	26	13	7	6	42	30	46
5 Athletic	26	11	8	7	33	29	41
6 Atlético	26	11	7	8	32	31	40
7 Osasuna	26	9	11	6	26	22	38
8 Betis	26	9	10	7	34	28	37
9 Villarreal	26	10	6	10	36	35	36
10 Sevilla	26	9	8	9	36	28	35
11 Málaga	26	11	2	13	36	40	35
12 Racing	26	9	6	11	33	39	32
13 Real Sociedad	26	8	7	11	30	37	31
14 Zaragoza	26	8	5	13	29	37	29
15 Valladolid	26	7	8	11	29	38	29
16 Albacete	26	8	5	13	25	34	29
17 Mallorca	26	8	5	13	29	44	29
18 Celta	26	6	9	11	36	47	27
19 Espanyol	26	7	2	17	26	48	23
20 Murcia	26	2	10	14	22	42	16

German Bundesliga

Werder Bremen maintained their seven-point lead in the Bundesliga as two second-half goals saw them eclipse Borussia Dortmund 2-0.

It took some time for Bremen to break through but Valerien Ismael broke the deadlock after 56 minutes before Ailton rounded off the win five minutes from time.

It was Ailton's 20th goal of the season.

With 12 games remaining, the race for the Bundesliga now looks increasingly like a two-horse affair between Bremen and Bayern Munich.

Defending champions Bayern stayed in touch with a 2-0 win at home to Wolfsburg to ensure they remain within seven points.

Roy Makaay scored his 13th goal of the season with a sensational strike after just 11 minutes, but Bayern were made to wait until 15 minutes before the end for Bastian Schweinsteiger to seal the triumph and keep the German giants in the hunt for the Bundesliga title.

Stuttgart slipped 12 points behind the pacesetters from the north after being held 0-0 by Schalke.

Action from last week's German Bundesliga

While their defence remains as tight as ever, Felix Magath's team appear to have lost their killer touch in front of goal as, despite creating most of the chances, they failed to break down a stubborn Schalke backline.

Surprise packages Bochum move fourth even though they were held 0-0 by Hansa Rostock, who had Thomas Rasmussen sent off.

The result lifts Peter Neururer's side above Bayer Leverkusen into fourth place, just three points adrift of Stuttgart.

However, Bochum will be disappointed not to have capitalised on Rasmussen's second-half dismissal, while the visitors were also left ruing missed chances after failing to convert a first-half penalty.

Hamburg boss Klaus Toppmoller exacted sweet revenge on his former team as Hamburg recorded a 3-1 victory over Bayer Leverkusen.

The game was effectively over as a contest after 35 minutes as Hamburg made an electric start to race into a 3-0 lead.

Nico-Jan Hoogma gave them a 10th-minute lead before Mehdi Mahdavikia converted a penalty eight minutes later.

Bernardo Romeo made it 3-0 after 35 minutes before Bernd Schneider scored a consolation six minutes before the interval.

Cologne remain rooted to the foot of the Bundesliga after a 3-1 home defeat by 1860 Munich.

The visitors had essentially won the game by half-time after storming into a 3-0 lead courtesy of a Markus Schroth brace and Benjamin Lauth's penalty.

Schroth struck after just 14 minutes and again six minutes before half-time while Lauth slotted home a 36th-minute spot-kick.

Andrej Voronin netted for Cologne five minutes after the restart to give the hosts some hope but it wasn't enough to stop Munich clinching their second away win in the Bundesliga this season.

It was also 3-1 in Frankfurt where local favourites Eintracht dispatched Borussia Monchengladbach.

Ervin Skela, Ioannis Amanatidis and Alexander Schur scored for the hosts with Arie Van Lent scoring the consolation.

Marcelinho ended his goal drought in style with a double strike as Hertha Berlin hauled themselves out of the relegation zone with a priceless 3-1 win at Hannover.

He netted the first and last goals of the match, with Giuseppe Reina also getting in on the act for Hertha, after Clint Mathis had briefly brought Hannover back onto level terms.

Relegation is looming for Kaiserslautern following the 1-0 loss at Freiburg.

It is unforgivable to have a man sent off early on for pettiness, and then to give away a late match-deciding penalty, and new coach Kurt Jara will surely read them the riot act if such spectacular acts of stupidity carry over into future games.

FIXTURES

Saturday 13th March 2004

B.Leverkusen	vs	Wolfsburg
Hannover	vs	Kaiserslautern
Bochum	vs	M.gladbach
Hamburg SV	vs	Hertha Berlin
B.Munich	vs	Hansa Rostock
Werder Bremen	vs	FC Cologne
VFB Stuttgart	vs	1860 Munich
Freiburg	vs	B.Dortmund
E.Frankfurt	vs	Schalke

Bayern Munich 2 Wolfsburg 0, Eintracht Frankfurt 3 Moenchengladbach 1, Bochum 0 Hansa Rostock 0, Hamburg 3 Bayer Leverkusen 1, Cologne 1 1860 Munich 3, Werder Bremen 2 Borussia Dortmund 0, Stuttgart 0 Schalke 0, Freiburg 1 Kaiserslautern 0, Hanover 1 Hertha Berlin 3.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 **Bremen**	**22**	**16**	**4**	**2**	**54**	**21**	**52**
2 Bayern	22	13	6	3	47	22	45
3 Stuttgart	22	11	7	4	27	10	40
4 Bochum	22	10	7	5	36	24	37
5 Leverkusen	22	10	6	6	39	28	36
6 Dortmund	22	10	4	8	36	30	34
7 Schalke	22	8	9	5	26	23	33
8 Hamburg	22	8	6	8	31	35	30
9 Wolfsburg	22	9	1	12	40	42	28
10 Freiburg	22	8	4	10	31	46	28
11 Hansa	22	7	6	9	32	32	27
12 1860 Munich	22	7	5	10	24	33	26
13 Hannover	22	6	6	10	38	50	24
14 Eintracht	22	6	5	11	25	33	23
15 Hertha	22	5	7	10	23	42	22
16 M'gladbach	22	5	6	11	23	33	21
17 Kaiserslautern	22	7	3	12	23	35	21
18 Köln	22	4	4	14	17	33	16

WORLD

Scottish Premier League

Celtic stretched their lead to a massive 16 points at the top of the Scottish Premier League.

While Martin O'Neill's champions elect were thrashing Livingston 5-1 at Parkhead, bitter rivals Rangers were losing 2-0 at Dundee United.

In Glasgow Stephen Pearson gave Celtic the perfect start, opening the scoring on 12 minutes.

And when Chris Sutton added a second 24 minutes later the visitors looked in for a hiding.

But Derek Lilley pulled one back four minutes before the break to at least give his team hope of an unlikely revival.

That hope was quickly extinguished after the restart though as the Bhoys struck twice in the space of seven minutes.

Celtic's Chris Sutton (right) celebrates scoring as Oscar Rubio and Fernando Pasquinelli of Livingston look on.

First Alan Thompson got in on the act with a fine strike to make it 3-1.

He cut in from the left flank and exchanged passes with Sutton before coolly curling a right-footed effort into the Livi net.

The inevitable goal from Henrik Larsson made it 4-1 on 55 minutes, the Swede smashing home a right-foot shot after Roddy McKenzie was penalised for picking up Manu Dorado's backpass.

Thompson added the fifth 10 minutes from time, firing home from the penalty spot.

At Tannadice meanwhile two goals in three first-half minutes condemned Rangers to a shock defeat.

Mark Kerr fired Dundee United into the lead on 31 minuts when he crashed in a shot off the bar after a right-wing cross from Andy McLaren had been cleared only as far as the ex-Falkirk man on the edge of the box.

And three minutes later McLaren himself made it 2-0 by heading in a Barry Robson corner to the far post from embarrassingly close range as far as the Rangers defence was concerned.

Hearts maintained their stranglehold on third place i by holding nearest challengers Dunfermline to a 0-0 draw.

Greg Shields came closest to breaking the deadlock for Dunfermline with an effort which hit a post in a game which did little to enhance the teams' reputations as the best in Scotland outside the Old Firm.

Motherwell took advantage of the Pars' failure to take all three points by moving to within two points of the top four after a 3-0 defeat of Partick.

The game only went ahead after the Fir Park pitch passed an inspection by referee Craig Thomson 90 minutes before kick-off.

And Thistle will probably wish the decision had gone the other way as goals from Steven Hammell (11), David Clarkson (52) and Derek Adams (80) gave Well all three points.

Partick's defeat allowed Aberdeen to pull 14 points clear of the SPL's bottom club with a 1-0 defeat of Hibernian at Easter Road. Scott Morrison netted the only goal of the game as he fired home after Paul Tosh laid a free-kick into his path on five minutes.

The win was not enough to take the Dons above Kilmarnock, though, as Jim Jefferies' men beat visitors Dundee 4-2.

Killie went into the game desperate to end a run of just one win in 10 but fell behind on five minutes when Nacho Novo netted.

But two goals in as many minutes from Eric Skora (32) and Danny Invincibile (34) ensured the hosts took a 2-1 lead into the interval.

Kris Boyd extended their advantage nine minutes after the break by slotting home a penalty after Invincibile had tumbled in the box but Steven Milne pegged a goal back for Dee on 62 minutes.

Invincibile was not to be outdone, though, and he netted two minutes later to seal victory for Jefferies' men.

Celtic 5 Livingston 1, Dundee Utd 2 Rangers 0, Dunfermline 0 Hearts 0, Hibernian 0 Aberdeen 1, Kilmarnock 4 Dundee 2, Motherwell 3 Partick 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celtic	26	25	1	0	86	13	76
Rangers	26	19	3	4	52	21	60
Hearts	26	14	5	7	38	28	47
Dunfermline	26	10	8	8	29	35	38
Motherwell	26	10	6	10	31	30	36
Dundee Utd	26	8	6	12	27	41	30
Livingston	26	7	8	11	30	38	29
Dundee	26	7	7	12	32	40	28
Hibernian	26	7	7	12	24	40	28
Kilmarnock	26	8	3	15	32	55	27
Aberdeen	26	7	5	14	30	43	26
Partick	26	3	3	20	27	54	12

Greek Ethniki Katigoria

Spiros Vallas fired in Olympiakos' first goal in their two-one win over less-fancied Kallithea.

Olympiakos kept their noses in front of championship rivals Panathinaikos at the top of the Hellenic National League with a 2-1 away win over Kallithea.

Spiros Vallas fired the visitors into a 24th minute lead, but relegation-threatened Kallithea gave their fans something to cheer about when Achilles Angelopoulos pulled the side level in the 60th minute.

However, their joy turned to despair just eight minutes later when Giorgos Koulakiotis scored an unfortunate own goal to hand Olympiakos victory.

Gate 7 supporters were in full voice as the Reds hope to again lift yet another championship winning trophy in Greece.

Panathinaikos remain in close pursuit after securing their ninth consecutive victory by defeating visiting Egaleo 2-0.

Cyprus international Michalis Konstantinou opened the scoring and Ezequiel Gonlez scored the second with a left-footed strike; his first goal since arriving in Greece.

PAOK maintained their grip on thrid with a 2-0 defeat of OFI Crete. Giasemakis Giasemi scored the first after excellent work by Christos Maladenis before Dimitris Salpingidis doubled the lead with a shot from long range.

A slender 1-0 win over Aris Salonika helped fifth-placed AEK Athens close the gap on the top four.

Vassilis Tsiartas was guilty of missing a 53rd minute penalty before Kofi Amponsah became the hero of the hour with a last-minute winner.

Panionios registered a comfortable 3-0 victory at Iraklis. Nikos Mitrou (21), Petr Vlcek (45) and Andreas Lagonikakis (54) secured the three points for Panionios which sees them leapfrog their opponents into seventh place.

Promoted Halkidona secured their fourth successive win as they triumphed 1-0 at Ionikos with top-scorer Giorgos Zaharopoulos again on the scoresheet.

Meanwhile Xanthi won 3-1 at Akratitos with Stelios Sfakianakis scoring the crucial third in stoppage time, while Proodeftiki secured a valuable 2-0 home win against Paniliakos.

Panathinaikos 2 Egaleo 0, Proodeftiki 2 Paniliakos 0, Iraklis 0 Panionios 3, Akratitos 1 Xanthi 3, Ionikos 0 Halkidona 1, PAOK 2 OFI Crete 0, AEK Athens 1 Aris Saloniki 0, Kallithea 1 Olympiakos 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olympiakos	22	18	2	2	54	14	56
Panathinaikos	22	17	4	1	44	13	55
PAOK	22	14	5	3	37	17	47
Egaleo	22	11	6	5	27	17	39
Halkidona	22	11	5	6	33	26	38
AEK	22	11	5	6	41	22	38
Panionios	22	8	9	5	29	21	33
Iraklis	22	9	5	8	28	31	32
Xanthi	22	7	5	10	22	30	26
OFI	22	6	5	11	22	35	23
Ionikos	22	6	4	12	24	31	22
Aris	22	5	4	13	17	31	19
Paniliakos	22	3	6	13	24	43	15
Kallithea	22	2	9	11	24	35	15
Akratitos	22	3	5	14	22	57	14
Proodeftiki	22	2	7	13	13	38	13

Dutch Eredivisie

Leaders Ajax Amsterdam and second-placed PSV Eindhoven suffered surprise defeats to lowly Utrecht and European hopefuls Roda JC respectively in the Dutch first division.

Ajax surprisingly went down to their second defeat in five days - 1-0 at Utrecht - in the early game, leaving the door open for PSV to move within three points of the Amsterdammers.

But Guus Hiddink's men were also beaten, going down 2-1 at home to Roda JC.

Utrecht's winning goal against Ajax came 14 minutes from time when Stefaan Tanghe sprang the offside trap before lifting the ball over advancing goalkeeper Maarten Stekelenburg.

Ajax piled forward in the closing stages, and Wesley Sneijder twice came close to saving a point.

First he drove wide from the edge of the box, before forcing a stunning save from Joost Terol from his 25-yard free-kick.

Meanwhile PSV got off to a terrible start, finding themselves 2-0 down inside 18 minutes thanks to goals from Arouna Kone and Cristiano.

Jan Vennegoor of Hesselink pulled one back 10 minutes before half-time, but PSV could not find an equaliser.

Feyenoord moved back up to third in the table following a comprehensive 3-0 win at Willem II.

Substitute Anthony Lurling opened the scoring on the hour mark and efforts from Chong-Gug Song and Ebi Smolarek secured Feyenoord's fourth away win of the season.

Volendam remain entrenched in the relegation play-offs following a 2-0 home defeat to ADO Den Haag.

Second-half goals from Cedric Van der Gun, who netted after 50 minutes, and from Roy Stroeve, whose goal came three minutes from the end, were sufficient for the team from The Hague.

The importance of the result can be measured in the fact that Den Haag - who are fourth-bottom - are now seven points better off than Volendam who are immediately below them in the standings.

RKC Waalwijk returned home from their trip north to Groningen with a 2-1 victory.

Jason Oost and Yuri Cornelisse put the visitors 2-0 up before Regillio Vrede netted an 82nd-minute consolation.

However, Groningen could not find the equaliser and the three points will be most welcome for RKC.

AZ Alkmaar failed to close the gap on the top two after suffering a 4-1 defeat at FC Twente.

The hosts made the best possible start when after 13 minutes Georgi Gakhokidze's long pass picked out Simon Cziommer who scored from 15 yards out.

But within 10 minutes AZ were level when Barry van Galen's quickly taken free-kick allowed Stein Huysegems to score.

However, Twente's moans soon turned to cheers when they were awarded a 32nd-minute penalty, which was converted by Gakhokidze before the home side extended their lead through Adil Ramzi two minutes before the break.

AZ added a fourth in the 55th minute with Cziommer beating off Barry Opdam before sliding the ball into the net.

In-form Heerenveen extended their unbeaten run to five games after coming from behind to beat lowly NEC 2-1 thanks to Mika Vayrynen's winner 13 minutes from time.

NEC's Youssouf Hersi gave the hosts a 13th-minute lead but Daniel Berg Hestad levelled matters just after the hour mark before Vayrynen snatched maximum points.

Anouar Diba scored a second-half equaliser to rescue a point for NAC Breda and keep them ahead of opponents RBC Roosendaal on goal difference following their 1-1 draw.

Diba struck in the 56th minute to level the match after Edwin De Graaf had fired the home side in front in the 20th minute.

Utrecht 1 Ajax Amsterdam 0, Groningen 1 RKC Waalwijk 2, Willem II 0 Feyenoord 3, PSV Eindhoven 1 Roda JC 2, Volendam 0 ADO Den Haag 2, Zwolle 1 Vitesse Arnhem 1, Roosendaal 1 NAC Breda 1, Twente 4 Alkmaar 1, NEC Nijmegen 1 Heerenveen 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ajax	23	18	1	4	52	23	55
PSV	23	15	4	4	59	21	49
Alkmaar	23	13	3	7	44	26	42
Feyenoord	23	12	6	5	43	31	42
Heerenveen	23	12	4	7	34	28	40
Roda	23	10	7	6	39	26	37
Twente	23	11	2	10	42	36	35
Willem II	23	9	7	7	33	34	34
NAC	23	8	7	8	37	34	31
Roosendaal	23	8	7	8	26	29	31
Waalwijk	23	8	6	9	32	28	30
Utrecht	23	8	6	9	28	31	30
Groningen	23	7	6	10	29	35	27
NEC	23	8	1	14	28	37	25
Den Haag	23	6	5	12	21	43	23
Volendam	23	4	4	15	20	59	16
Vitesse	23	2	10	11	26	39	16
Zwolle	23	2	6	15	14	47	12

Belgian First Division

Club Bruges moved above Standard Liege into second place in the Belgian first division after winning 3-1 at Beveren, who finished with 10 men and scored an own goal to cap a disastrous night.

Leaders Anderlecht, whose home game with Heusden-Zolder was postponed due to snow, remained 16 points clear but Standard's 3-2 defeat at La Louviere leaves them level on 46 points with Bruges, who have won a game more.

Beveren forward Ndric Romanic opened the scoring in the 13th minute after an error by Bruges defender Peter Van der Heyden and at that stage they were having the best of the exchanges.

But Andres Mendoza equalised with a header from a cross by Gert Verheyen eight minutes after the break and once Beveren had Junior D'Jire sent off for pushing a linesman 20 minutes from time Bruges began to take control.

Six minutes after D'Jire's dismissal Verheyen took advantage of uncertainty in the Beveren defence to put Bruges 2-1 ahead.

Beveren defender Ne then capped a miserable night for the home side when he put the ball into his own goal.

Standard suffered their first defeat in 16 games as La Louviere played some excellent football inspired by Gunther Van Handenhoven, Yannick Vervalle and Peter Odemwingie.

Standard tried to dominate with their usual high-speed game and took the lead through Emile Mpenza after 14 minutes on the counter-attack but La Louviere equalised almost immediately.

Oguchi Onyewu took advantage of a miscalculation by the Standard defence who wrongly believed he was offside.

The home side then began to take control and in the 31st minute Mamar Mamouni scored from the penalty spot after Standard goalkeeper Fabian Carini had fouled Van Handenhoven.

Mamoumi got his second and La Louviere's third goal after 57 minutes with an assist from Vervalle.

Uruguayan Juan Ramon Curbello scored Standard's second goal seven minutes from time but they could not find an equaliser.

Sixth-placed Westerlo enjoyed a 7-3 win against Lokeren with their goals coming from six different players and the team coached by their former great Jan Ceulemans is firmly established among the clubs fighting for a European place.

Bottom club Royal Antwerp's home game with fifth-placed Excelsior Mouscron was also postponed because of snow.

La Louviere 3 Standard Liege 2, Genk 2 Lierse 0, Sint-Truiden 1 Charleroi 2, Gent 1 Germinal Beerschot 1, Cercle Brugge 0 Mons 1, Westerlo 7 Lokeren 3, Beveren 1 Club Brugge 3, (Antwerp vs Excelsior - Postponed, Anderlecht vs Heusden-Zolder – Postponed).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Anderlecht	23	20	2	1	57	18	62
Club Brugge	24	14	4	6	51	25	46
Standard	24	13	7	4	50	23	46
Genk	24	12	6	6	45	30	42
Mouscron	23	11	9	3	46	29	42
Westerlo	24	11	8	5	37	28	41
Germinal Beerschot	24	8	9	7	22	25	33
Sint-Truiden	24	8	7	9	28	35	31
Beveren	24	9	2	13	34	41	29
La LouviÈre	24	6	11	7	31	34	29
AA Gent	24	6	10	8	23	25	28
Mons	24	5	9	10	23	32	24
Cercle Brugge	24	5	9	10	20	42	24
Lierse	24	4	11	9	22	32	23
Charleroi	24	5	7	12	23	32	22
Lokeren	24	5	7	12	29	42	22
Heusden	23	4	6	13	22	41	18
Antwerp	23	4	4	15	17	46	16

Anfield great warns Houllier

Liverpool great Alan Hansen has told manager Gerard Houllier he faces the sack unless the club qualify for the Champions League.

The Frenchman saw his last remaining hope of domestic silverware this season end on Sunday when Liverpool suffered a 1-0 FA Cup fifth round replay defeat away to Premiership strugglers Portsmouth.

Although the Anfield club are still in the UEFA Cup, the Liverpool board have made it clear that finishing in the top four of the Premiership and so qualifying for the Champions League is their top priority.

Liverpool are currently sixth in the table, three points behind fourth-placed Newcastle.

Hansen, a defensive pillar in Liverpool's trophy-winning sides of the late 1970s and 1980s – when the club won four European Cups in seven years – said in his column for the BBC website today that Houllier can not survive if the Anfield club miss out on the European elite again.

"If Liverpool do not get into the Champions League, the Anfield board will be under tremendous pressure to make a change and Gerard himself will also be under unbelievable pressure," writes Hansen.

"The Champions League is vital to Houllier's future now – and if Liverpool's players want to back up all the nice things they say about their manager, they should try to save him by getting a top four Premiership place at all costs."

Looking ahead, the former Scotland defender said there are two areas of "serious concern" which Liverpool have to address.

"I think at times they are far too negative and I also think they lack pace in the key areas of the two central defensive positions and in the holding midfield player.

"I also think there have got to be times when you have to put teams under tremendous pressure, and Liverpool do not do it enough."

PARMA MUST BE SOLD

THE collapsed Italian dairy giant Parmalat must sell off its soccer club Parma, Italy's Industry Minister Antonio Marzano said last week.

Marzano said Parmalat need to "restructure and become more efficient" and one of the best ways of cutting costs is to sell off Parma, of which the company owns 98.7 per cent.

"I am sorry for the supporters but I don't see what football has got to do with milk," said the minister.

Despite their owners' difficulties, Parma are fifth in the 18-team Italian Serie A.

Parmalat should also sell or hire out Parmatour, the travel and leisure company run by the Tanzi family, said Marzano.

Parmatour is not owned by Parmalat Finanziaria but by the holding company which controls Parmalat, Coloniale.

Parmalat face debts of 14.3 billion euros ($17.9 billion) and most of their former executives have been detained and are being questioned about suspected fraud.

Investigating magistrates said last week they believe around 900m euros was diverted from Parmalat, of which 500m was for personal use and 400m for Parmatour.

Roma confirm talks with Russian firm

AS Roma president Franco Sensi said in an interview published last week that a Russian company was in talks to buy the Serie A club in a deal which could see the first foreign ownership of a top Italian team.

'It is true there are negotiations with the Russians but it will be a very long matter,' Sensi was quoted as saying by Tuesday's Gazzetta dello Sport.

Roma, however, later said Sensi's remarks had been misconstrued.

'By now it seems obvious that some people are bent on systematically manipulating president Sensi's statements, twisting their meaning,' the club said on its website.

Gazzetta said the Russian firm, whom they identified as Nafta Moscow, had made an offer of 400 million euros ($502.1 million) for the 2001 Italian champions, now second in Serie A.

Nafta Moscow declined to comment.

If the company were to take over, Roma would become the second top European club under the control of Russian businessmen.

Chelsea is owned by billionaire Roman Abramovich, who has invested £121million in new players such as Argentines Hernan Crespo and Juan Sebastien Veron since taking over last July.

Sensi, 77, had previously signalled his intention to stand down as president at the end of this season but was quoted as saying that if the deal came to fruition he would remain involved as honorary president.

'The fans don't need to worry because even if they (the Russians) arrive I won't be giving up, because I want the best for Roma. In any case I will stay on as honorary president,' he was quoted as saying.

Roma have suffered from financial problems in the past year.

During the close season they were barred from international transfers due to an outstanding debt on a deal and Gazzetta said the club had debts of 250 million euros.

Roma would not be the first Italian club to come under foreign ownership. Vicenza, now in Serie B, were bought by the British firm ENIC in the late 1990s but none of the major title contending teams have ever been out of Italian hands.

French Ligue 1

Ligue 1 leaders Monaco were given a scare by relegation candidates Toulouse before securing a point at the Stadium Municipal from a 1-1 draw.

Toulouse's goal came from Sylvain Didot, who headed home two minutes after the interval to give his side a deserved lead.

Gael Givet's 70th minute equaliser left the principality club with some of their pride intact.

Second-placed Lyon failed to take advantage as they were held 1-1 by Lens at the Stade Bollaert.

Paul Le Guen's side led through midfielder Vikash Dhorasoo's 34th-minute goal but the home side fought back and Wagneau Eloi levelled with a free-kick.

Lille's Matt Moussilou netted either side of half-time to compound 10-man Montpellier's relegation worries following the 0-2 home loss.

The forward struck on 13 and 70 minutes to settle a disappointing encounter at La Mosson which was littered with yellow cards.

Montpellier's Serbo-Montenegrin defender Nenad Dzodig picked up his second booking of the game and was sent off.

Nantes defender Mario Yepes was left holding his head in his hands as his own goal in the fourth minute of stoppage time gave Strasbourg a share of the points.

Frederic Da Rocha gave Nantes the lead with a powerful shot after good work down the wing from Gilles Yapi.

But with 93 minutes on the clock, Yepes put through his own goal to mean his side had to settle for a point.

Rock-bottom Le Mans were also denied by a last-minute goal as Senegal international Lamine Diatta netted to snatch a point for Rennes.

Le Mans have now won just one of their last nine games and are three points away from safety.

They fell behind early on to a Frederic Piquionne goal but a brace from Laurent Peyrelade looked to have earned a precious win.

However, Diatta's goal spoiled the home celebrations and Le Mans had to be content with a point.

Sochaux's surprise bid to claim a place in next season's Champions League gathered momentum thanks to a goal from in-form striker Pierre-Alain Frau.

The striker was on target to keep the Montbeliard club in touch with the leading pack in Ligue 1 with a 2-1 defeat of Bastia.

Ajaccio climbed five points clear of the relegation zone with a hard-earned 1-0 victory over a Bordeaux team who finished the match with 10 men.

Mamadou Bagayoko's goal was the difference between the teams, while Marc Planus was sent off 18 minutes from the end after a professional foul on Yohan Demont.

Marseille had the better of the south coast derby but were denied victory by a Nice team who lived up to their reputation as Ligue 1's draw specialists by forcing a 0-0stalemate.

This was the 12th draw of the season for Nice who have lost only five games in the league but whose propensity to finish all-square means they reside in mid-table.

Auxerre striker Djibril Cisse showed France what they could be missing at Euro 2004 with his well-taken goal in a 1-1 draw at home to Paris Saint Germain.

Cisse's goal in first half injury time came after a good cross from the left by Jean-Pascal Mignot which Cisse perfectly controlled with his right foot before volleying home.

Lorik Cana however equalized in the 80th minute for PSG. Danijel Ljuboja pulled the ball back for Cana to side-foot home to earn the capital city club a point.

Nantes 1 Strasbourg 1, Lens 1 Lyon 1, Toulouse 1 Monaco 1, Le Mans 2 Stade Rennes 2, Montpellier 0 Lille 2, Sochaux 2 Bastia 1, Ajaccio 1 Bordeaux 0, Nice 0 Marseille 0, Auxerre 1 Paris St Germain 1, (Guingamp vs Metz – Postponed).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Monaco	26	16	7	3	44	18	55
Lyon	26	15	6	5	44	20	51
PSG	26	14	8	4	37	19	50
Sochaux	26	14	6	6	39	28	48
Auxerre	26	14	4	8	43	21	46
Marseille	26	13	4	9	33	26	43
Nantes	26	11	6	9	29	23	39
Nice	26	9	12	5	27	22	39
Bordeaux	26	10	7	9	25	27	37
Lens	26	11	4	11	23	38	37
Lille	26	9	7	10	28	28	34
Rennes	26	8	9	9	33	28	33
Strasbourg	26	8	7	11	37	37	31
Bastia	26	7	8	11	26	35	29
Ajaccio	26	7	6	13	23	37	27
Metz	25	6	6	13	17	27	24
Guingamp	25	7	3	15	21	38	24
Toulouse	26	5	7	14	19	34	22
Montpellier	26	6	4	16	29	51	22
Mans	26	4	9	13	20	40	21

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